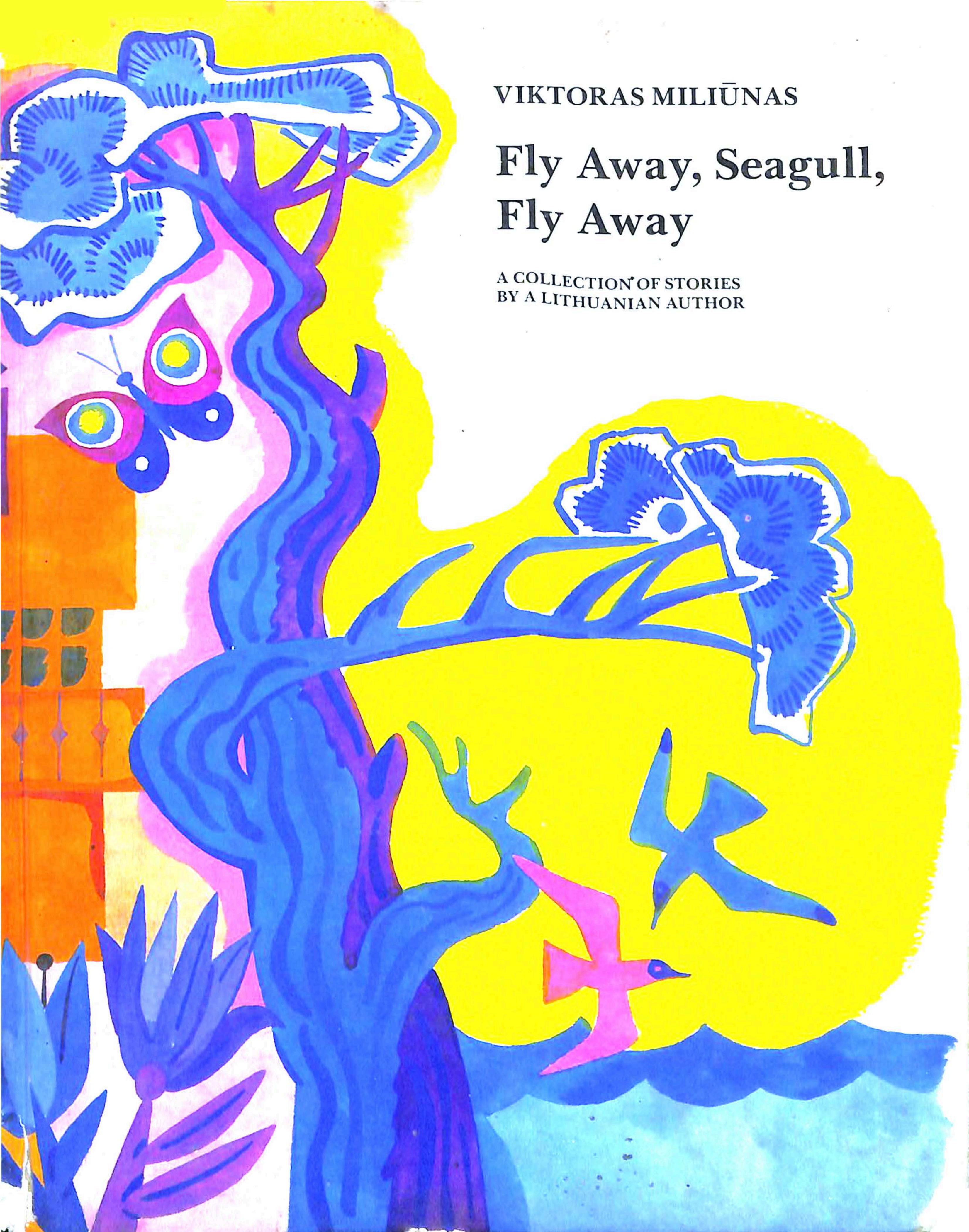
VIKTORAS MILIŪNAS

Fly Away, Seagull, Fly Away

A COLLECTION OF STORIES
BY A LITHUANIAN AUTHOR



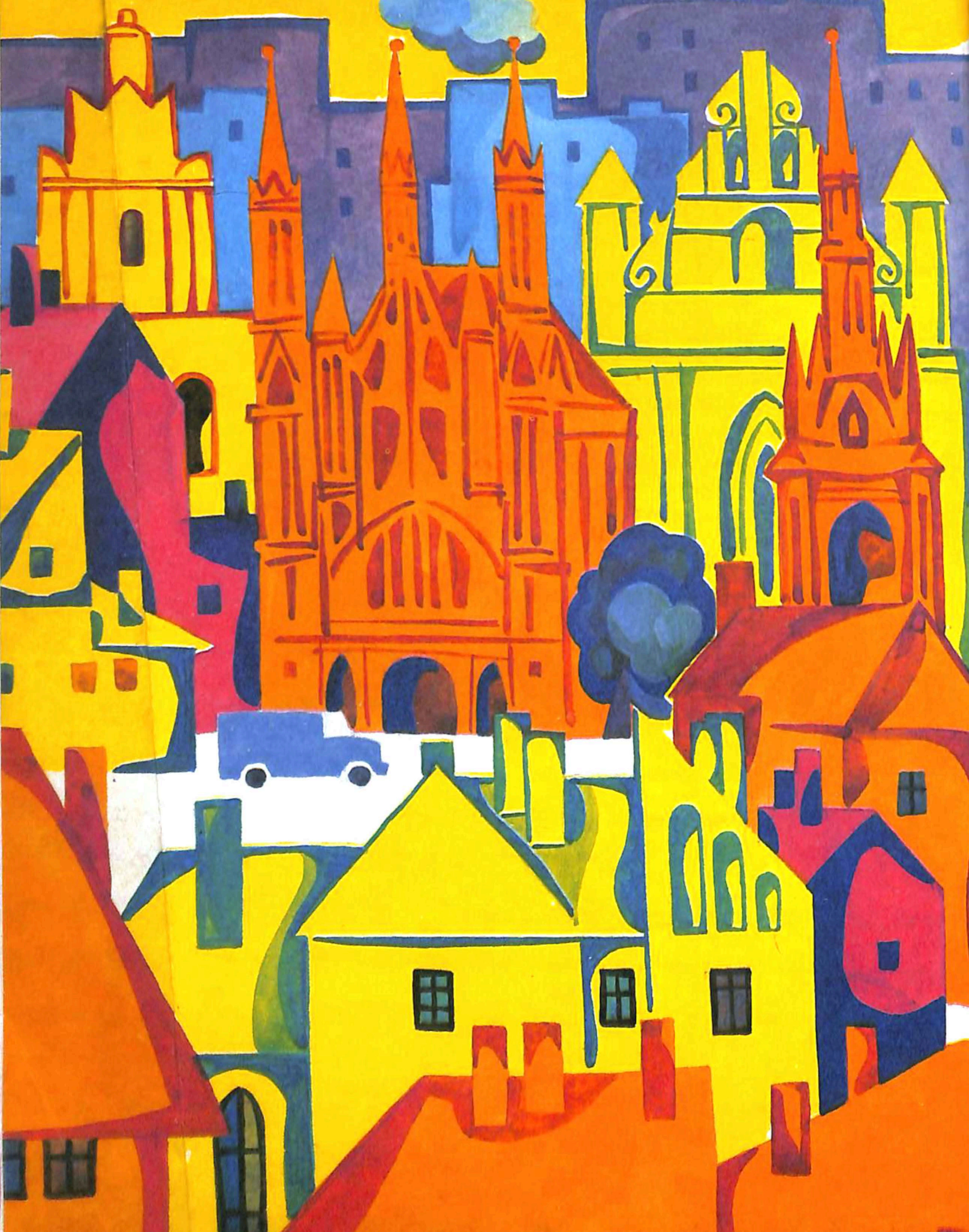
Lithuania is one of the Soviet Union Republics on the shores of the Baltic Sea. In the summer months people flock to the Baltic to spend their holidays on its excellent sandy beaches, go bathing or enjoy its invigorating air.

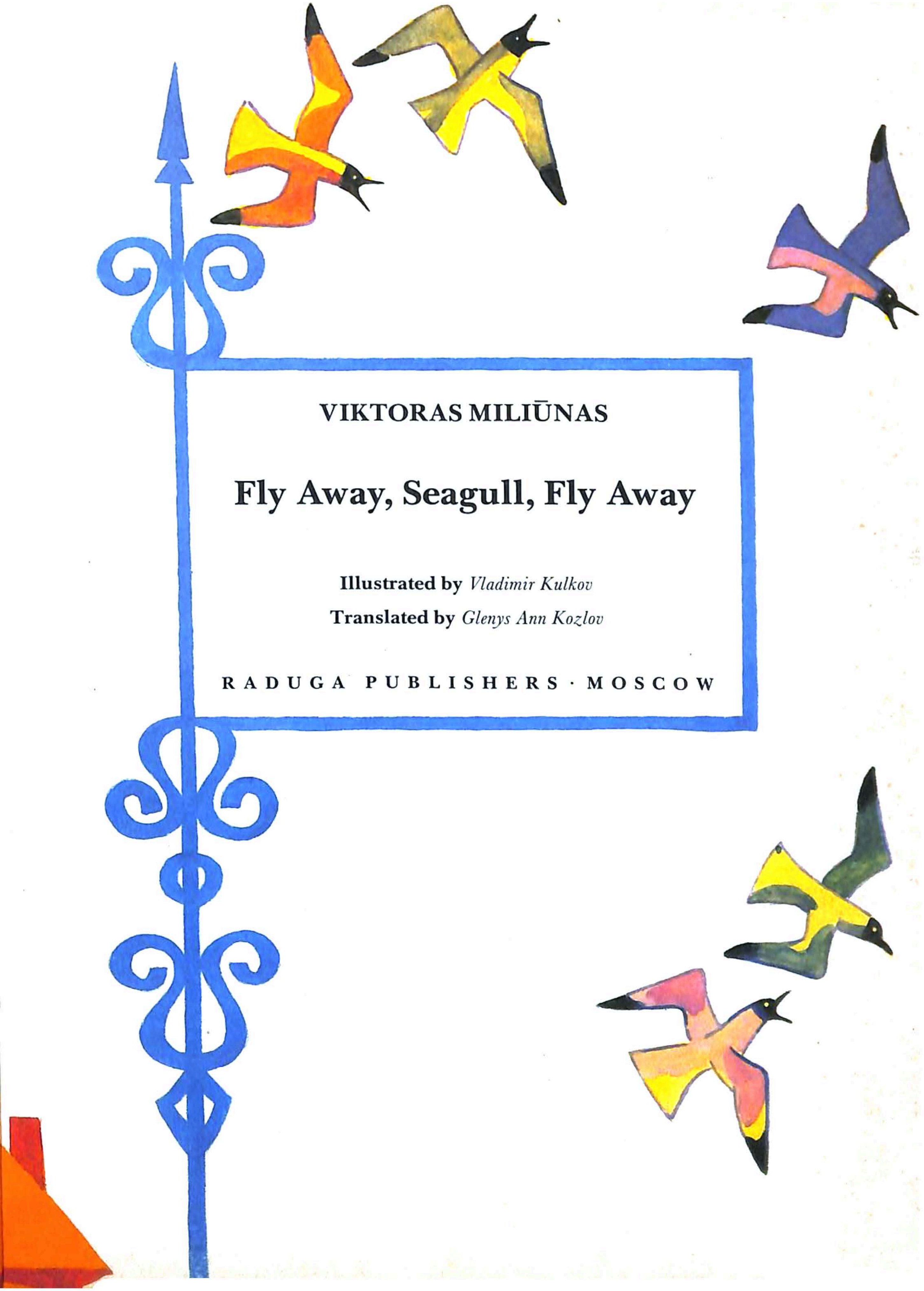
At that time of the year the coast is swarming with noisy, cheerful people.

But the Baltic Sea coast is not just seaside resorts. Fishermen live and work there, too. The Lithuanian fishermen are brave, stern people. They go fishing in small motor boats, which have a crew of just three people. But the Baltic's moods are unpredictable. A squally wind may suddenly spring up and cause a storm.

The capital of Lithuania, the ancient city of Vilnius, spreads along the banks of the river Neris. It is a beautiful city with its old narrow streets and lanes, its mediaeval churches and its new districts with wide, busy thoroughfares.

Lithuania is a land of plains, forests, gently flowing rivers, and endless fields of potatoes, flax, and oats. Numerous herds graze in its meadows. There are many lakes and marshes, and where there are marshes, there is peat. Almost all the country's electric power-stations are run on peat. Lithuania's plants and factories produce machinery, machine tools, and build seagoing fishing vessels, which then set out to plough the seas and oceans of the globe.



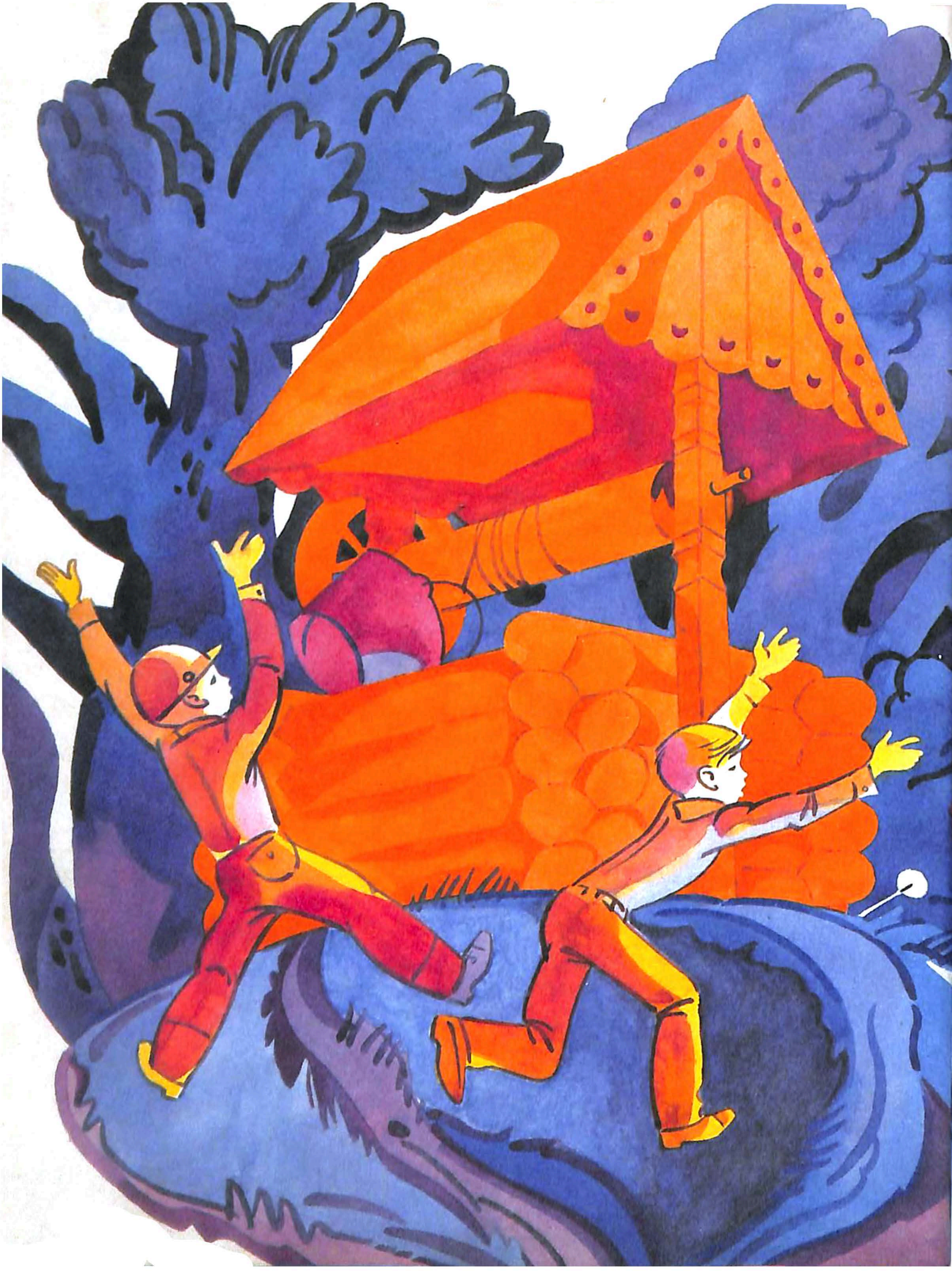


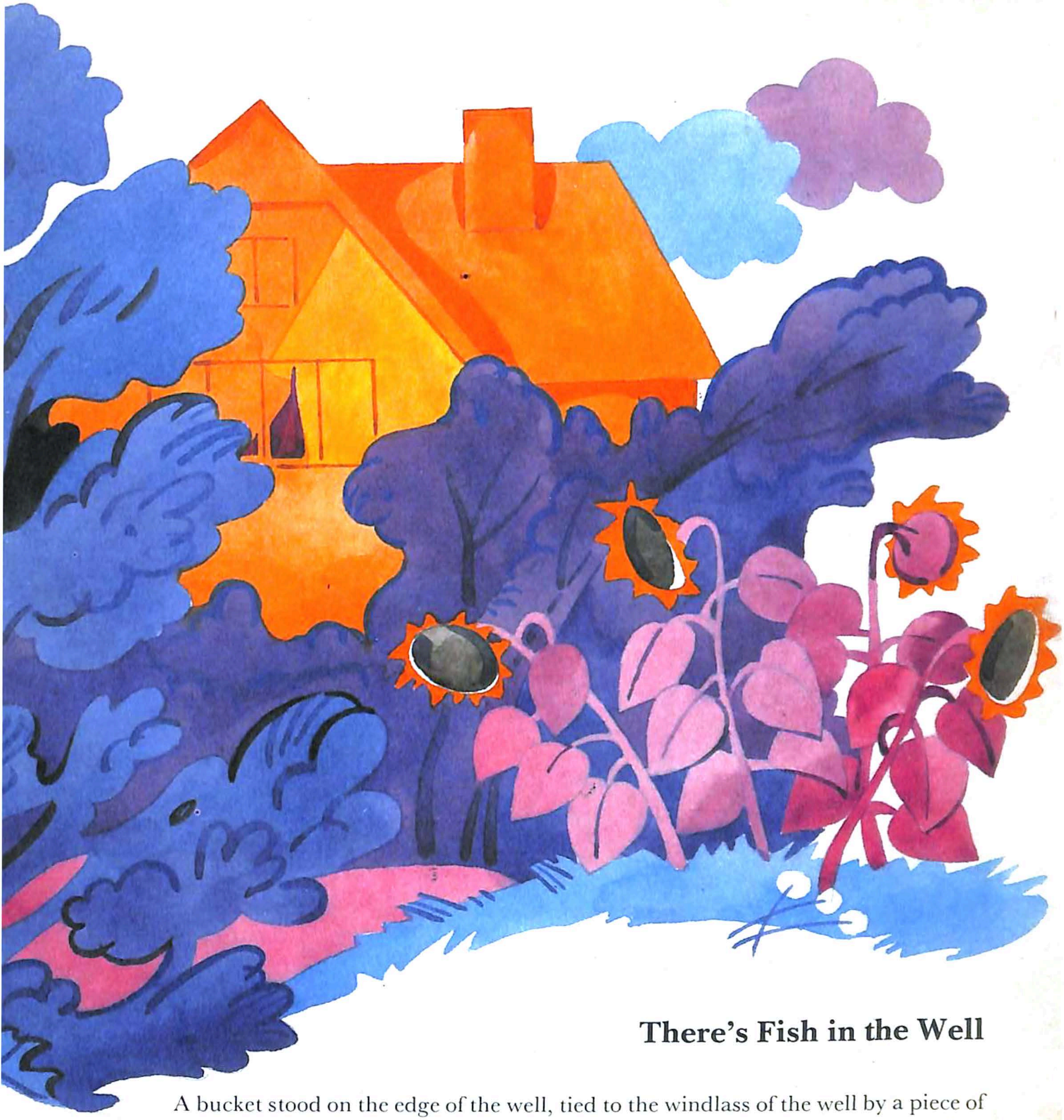
VIKTORAS MILIŪNAS

Fly Away, Seagull, Fly Away

Illustrated by *Vladimir Kulkov*
Translated by *Glenys Ann Kozlov*

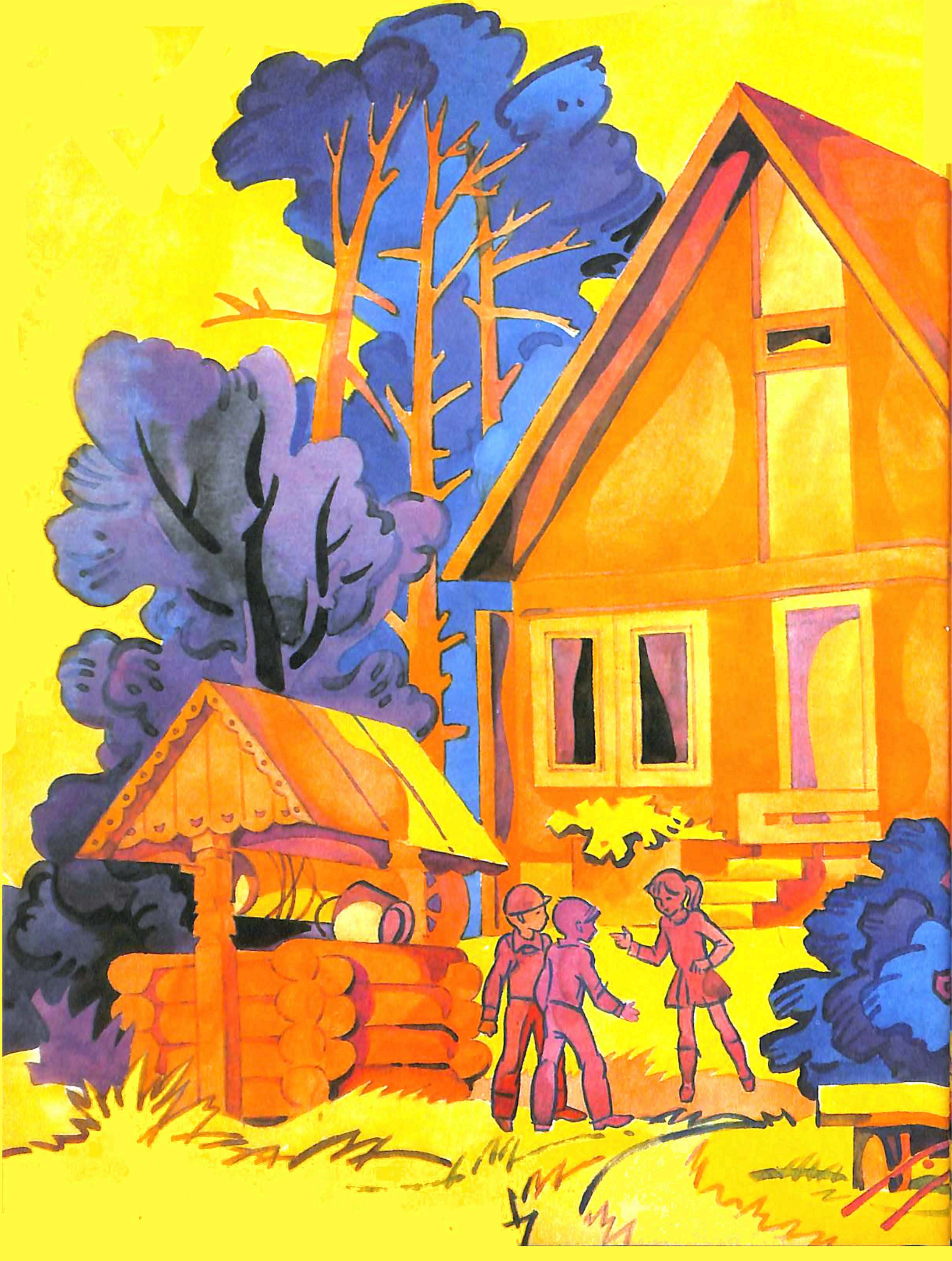
RADUGA PUBLISHERS · MOSCOW





There's Fish in the Well

A bucket stood on the edge of the well, tied to the windlass of the well by a piece of string. Romas and Giedrius were running round the well, looking into the bucket, tapping its metal sides and laughing at one another... But suddenly, crash, bang! Suddenly the bucket fell over. There was such a clatter as the water splashed onto the ground and into the well. The boys jumped back and then rushed towards the well. The bucket was empty. They examined it carefully, looked around on the ground, and then bent over the edge of the well.



What were they to do now? It was awful! Then, as if out of spite, Rūta, the girl from next door, came up to them, grinning wickedly, "Ah, you're in for it now!"

"We didn't do it on purpose. It fell over by itself..."

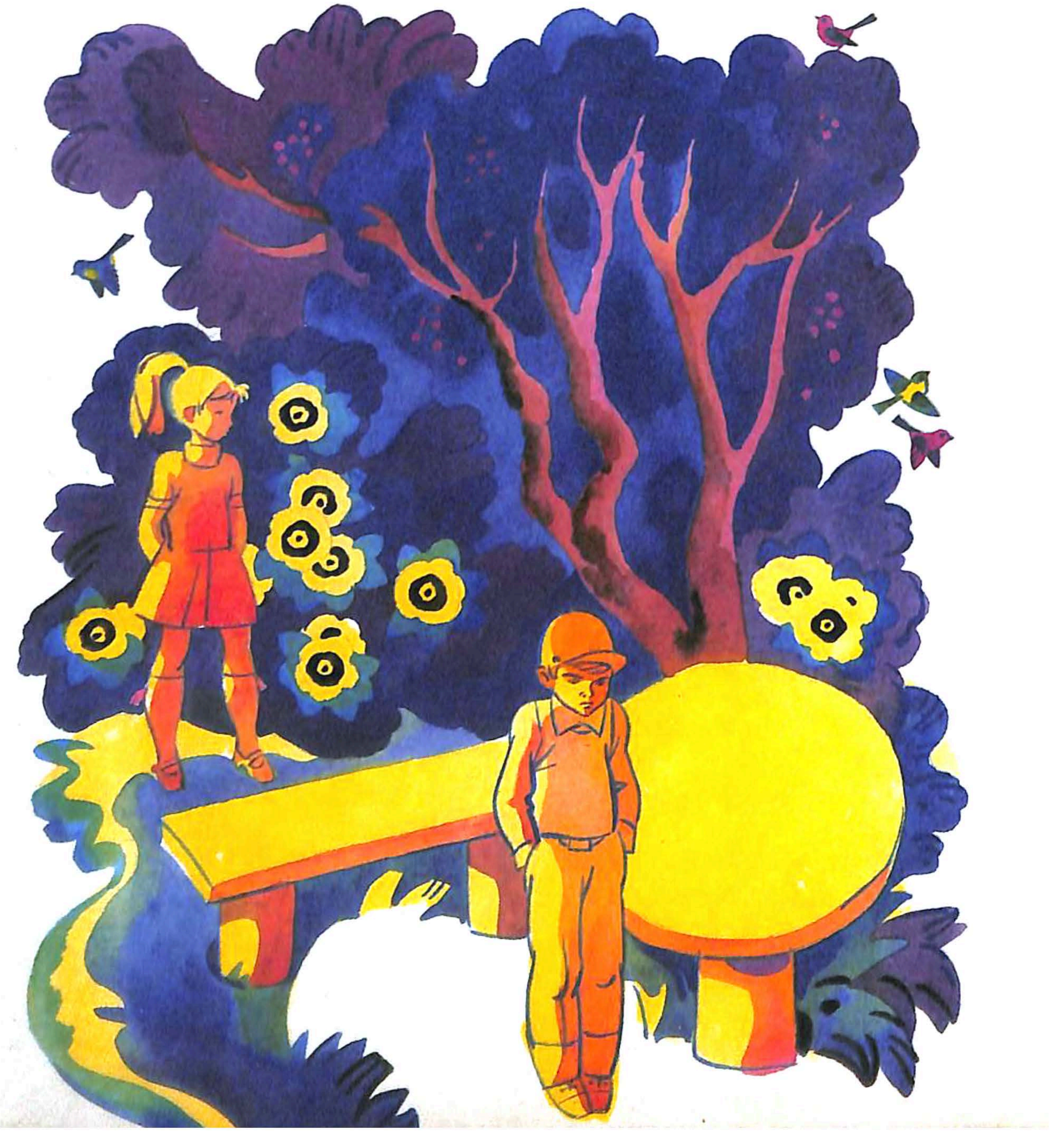
"Ah, by itself! I saw just how it fell over 'by itself'. I'll go and tell your Grandfather and he'll show you what happens to people who do things 'not on purpose'. Why did you let the fish go in the well? I saw everything."

But what were they to do? There had indeed been five perch in the bucket, the whole of their morning's catch. It was a good job the fish hadn't been biting well that day or just think how many fish there'd be in the well now! It was just too awful for words!

"It was an accident, Rūta dear! Please don't tell. There's no need to tell!" Giedrius begged in a pitiful voice.

But Romas became angry. "If you tell, then what? We'll get into trouble, but what good is that to you? You would do better to think how we can get the fish out."

"Get them out just like you put them in!" replied Rūta, standing with her arms akimbo. "It's not my fault you let the perch go in the well..."



Giedrius was a good friend. He did not want to see Romas get into trouble, so he tried to help his friend.

"But we didn't do it on purpose, you know!"

"Why did you put the fish in the bucket then? 'Not on purpose', you don't say!" And she made straight for Romas' door.

Things looked bad. The well was indeed there for people to draw water from it and not for fish to swim in it. He would be in Grandfather's bad books. He would get into trouble, for certain.

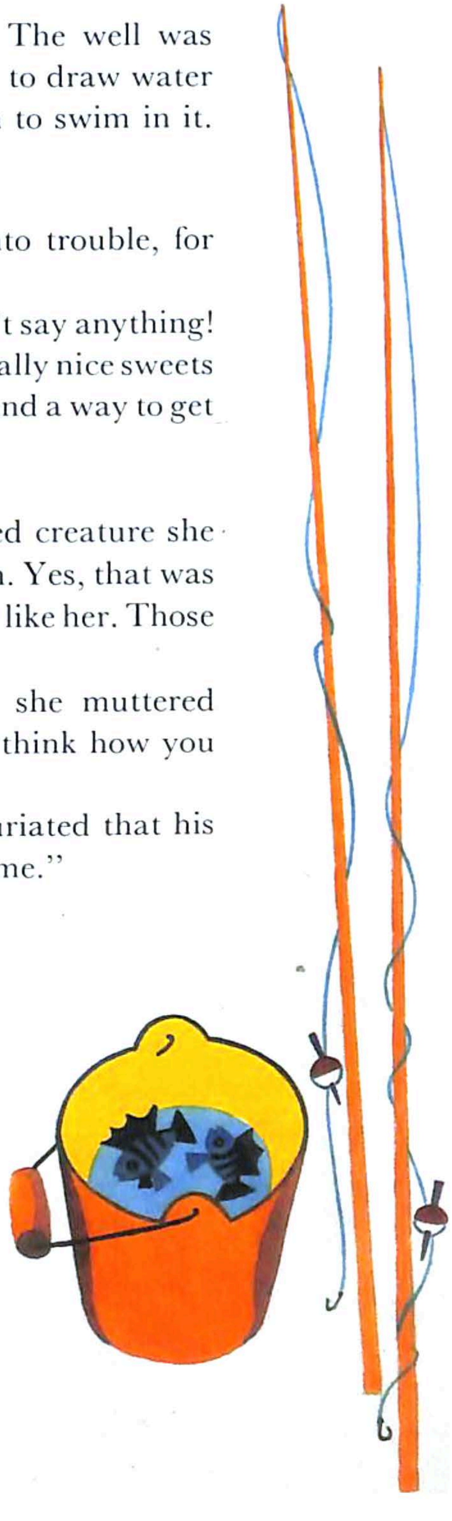
"Rūta, Rūta!" Giedrius ran after her. "Wait a minute! Don't say anything! I'll give you a sweet if you like. Honestly I will. I've got three really nice sweets at home, in golden wrappings... We'll catch the perch. We'll find a way to get them out. Wait a bit, okay?"

Rūta agreed to wait a while, and Giedrius rushed home.

Romas looked sideways at her and thought, what a wicked creature she was. He couldn't understand why the adults liked her so much. Yes, that was Rūta, the obedient, the clever, and pretty... But Romas didn't like her. Those who tell tales can never be pretty.

His angry glances made Rūta feel uncomfortable, and she muttered through her teeth, "What are you looking at? You'd better think how you can get the perch out or I'll go and tell just the same."

"Go on then! Run along, tell tale tit!" Romas was so infuriated that his ears were burning. "You ought at least to have a sense of shame."

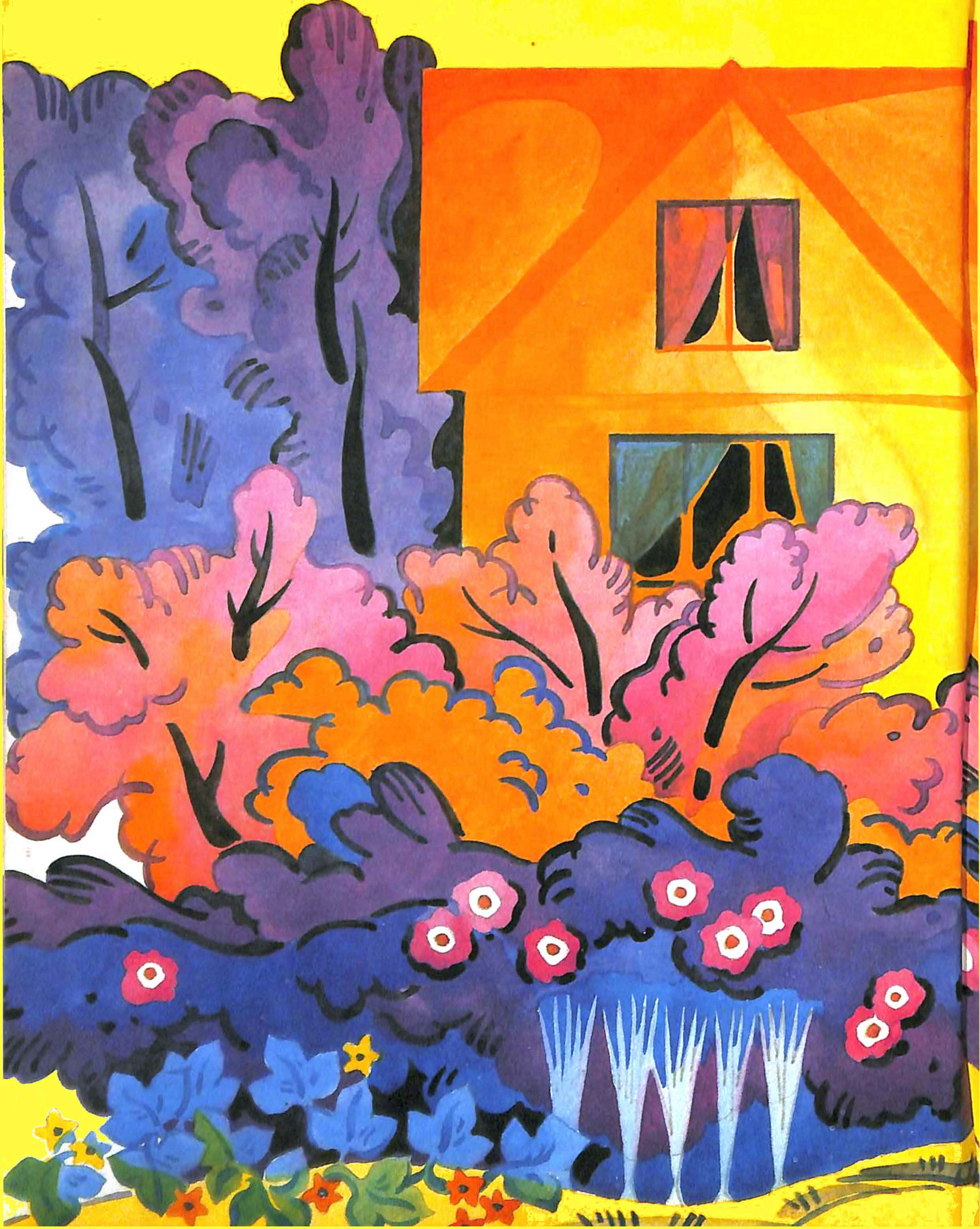


"No sense of shame, you say? And aren't you ashamed of yourself, letting the fish go in the well. What are we supposed to do now? Drink water with fish in it?"

"But we didn't do it on purpose, you know," Romas tried to convince her yet again.

"If you didn't do it on purpose, then what are you afraid of?"

"That's right, what am I afraid of?" Romas suddenly fell to thinking. "I really didn't do it on purpose. Of course, they won't be pleased with me for doing it, but if I own up to it myself..." Then, with a frown he said, "I'm not a bit



afraid. I'll go and tell Grandfather all about it myself."

"Go on then, if you're so brave. What are you just standing there for? Off you go!"

"I'm going," he mumbled, but did not move an inch. It's not much fun owning up.

"Go on then! I'm not stopping you," Rūta egged him on.

So, Romas had to go and see Grandfather. Kicking up the sand as he walked, he went towards his door. He opened it slowly and peeped into the kitchen. Grandfather was sitting at the table, sharpening his knife on the whetstone. Romas stood still on the threshold, looked at Grandfather and remained silent as if he had lost his tongue. What should he say, where should he begin? Grandfather who continued to draw the knife blade along the whetstone, gave his grandson a kindly glance.

"Well, what's new, sonny?"

Here Romas plucked up courage and blurted out, "We've let some fish go in the well!"

"What d'you say," Grandfather had not understood him.

"Perch... Five perch... Giedrius and I did it. We brought them back from fishing, and we wanted to see how they would swim in the bucket. But the bucket suddenly toppled over, and the fish went right into the well..."

"Uh-ha..." Grandfather's eyes did not look as kind as they usually did. "So, your catch is in the well now?"

"Yes, in the well," sighed Romas sorrowfully.

"Well, you're a fine pair, aren't you!" Grandfather put his knife and his whetstone on one side and looked at his grandson closely and reproachfully. "Well, and what d'you want me to do about it?" (Romas remained silent and lowered his head all the time. His cheeks were absolutely burning.) "I expect you really want me to help you get those perch out of the well, don't you? Am I right? Come on then, let's go!"

Phew! That was a load off his mind. If anyone could cope with the problem, Grandfather could! Now he'd make sure that that horrible Rūta would never see those sweets!

Romas has only just gone out into the yard, however, when he espied Giedrius standing by the well. Rūta was standing next to him, her mouth full of sweets, smacking her lips with pleasure. Her lips, cheeks and chin were covered with chocolate. What a pity, he was too late!

Romas and his Grandfather went up to the well. Giedrius stepped back cautiously. He didn't know what to expect… Rūta did not budge an inch. She just stood there, chewing her sweets and looking at Romas, her eyes screwed up.

"How shall we get them out?" Grandfather asked the trio. "Perhaps we should use a hook and line. We'll put a worm on the hook, and when the fish bites, we'll jerk it out. What about it?"

Giedrius blinked, his glance wandering from Romas to Grandfather. He couldn't understand how Grandfather had found out about the perch.

"Don't you agree with me? Quite right you are, too! How could we possibly use a worm in the well? People drink water from the well. We'll have to bale the water out. Have you got anything against that? At the same time, you can water the kitchen garden." (Romas and Giedrius exchanged glances and nodded.) "Then run and fetch the watering can."

When he wound up the rope and pulled the bucket out of the well, Grandfather muttered good-naturedly, "That's a fine job they've given me. There's no doubt about it! It's the first time in my life I've had to catch fish in a well…"

There were no perch in the bucket. Grandfather poured the water into the watering can, and, taking hold of the handle, the boys carried it between them to the kitchen garden. Then Grandfather pulled up a second bucket, than a third… Only the fifth bucket had a little fish darting about in it.

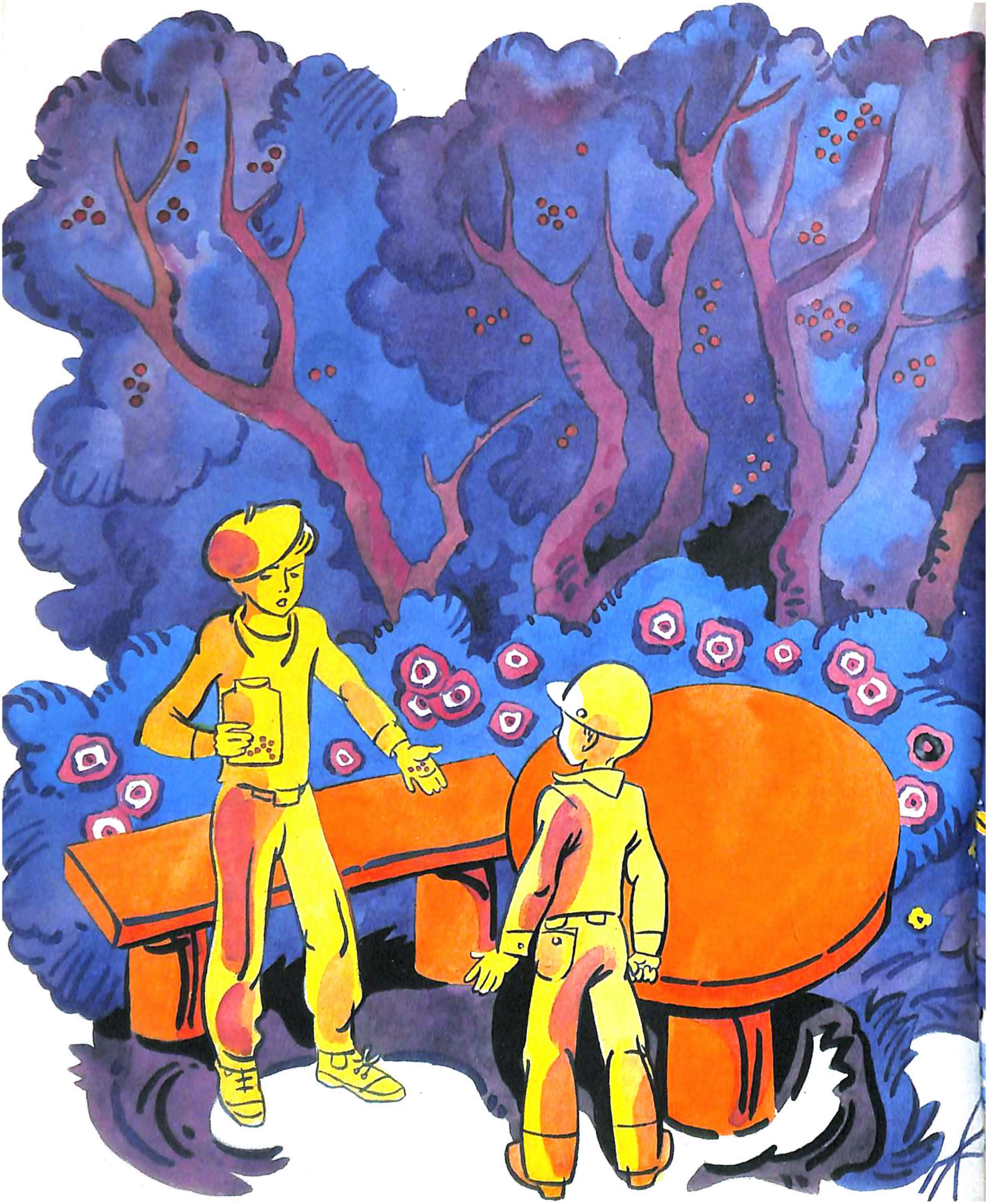
"There's one," shouted the boys enthusiastically. Even Rūta was glad about it.

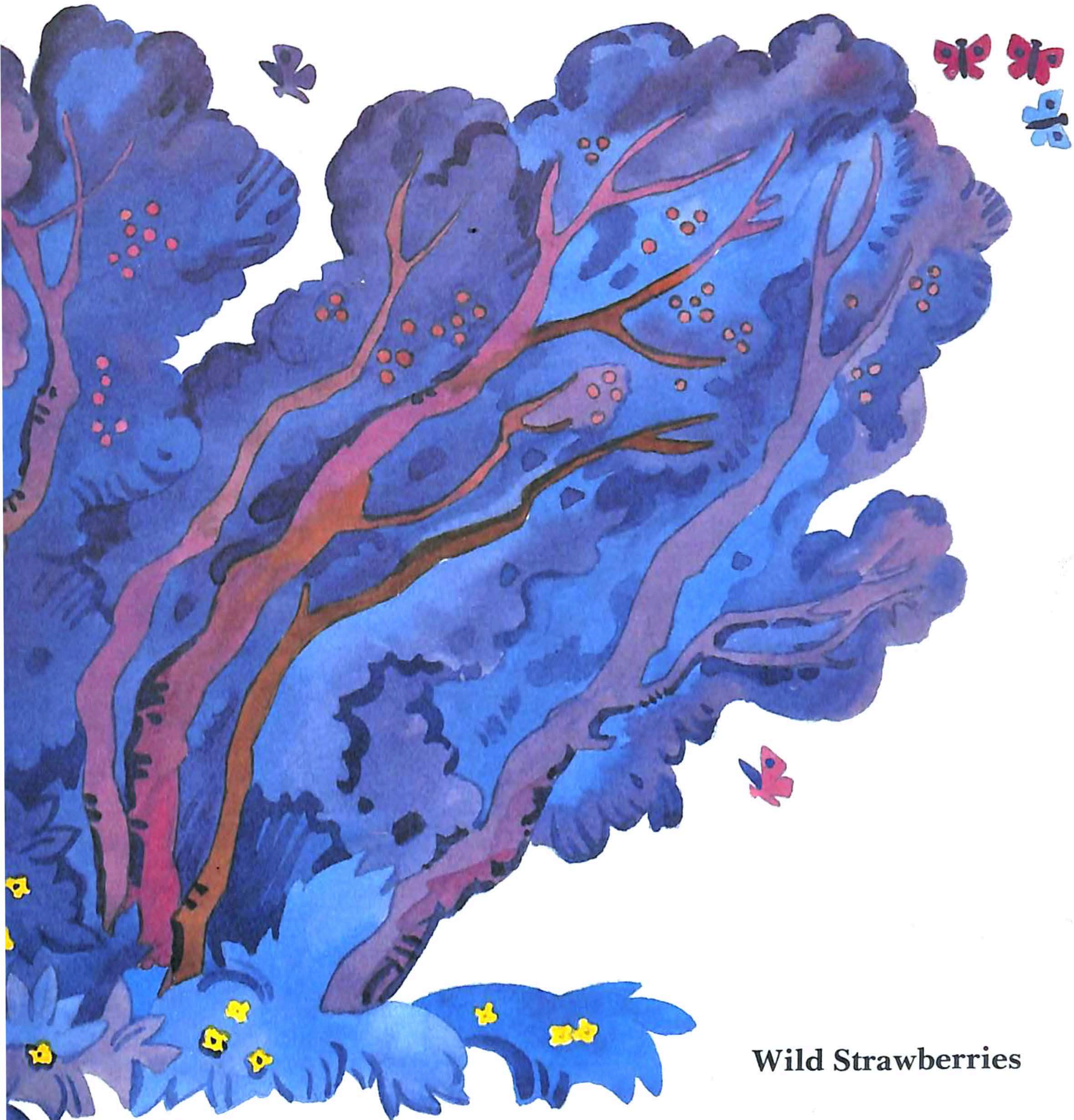
They had already watered all the beds in the garden, the cucumbers, the tomatoes, the onions… They had even emptied two watering cans under each apple-tree.

"How did Grandfather find out about it?" Giedrius asked his friend in a whisper.

"Oh, I told him about it myself. We can't have perch living in the well, you know!"

And they went back to Grandfather for another can of water.



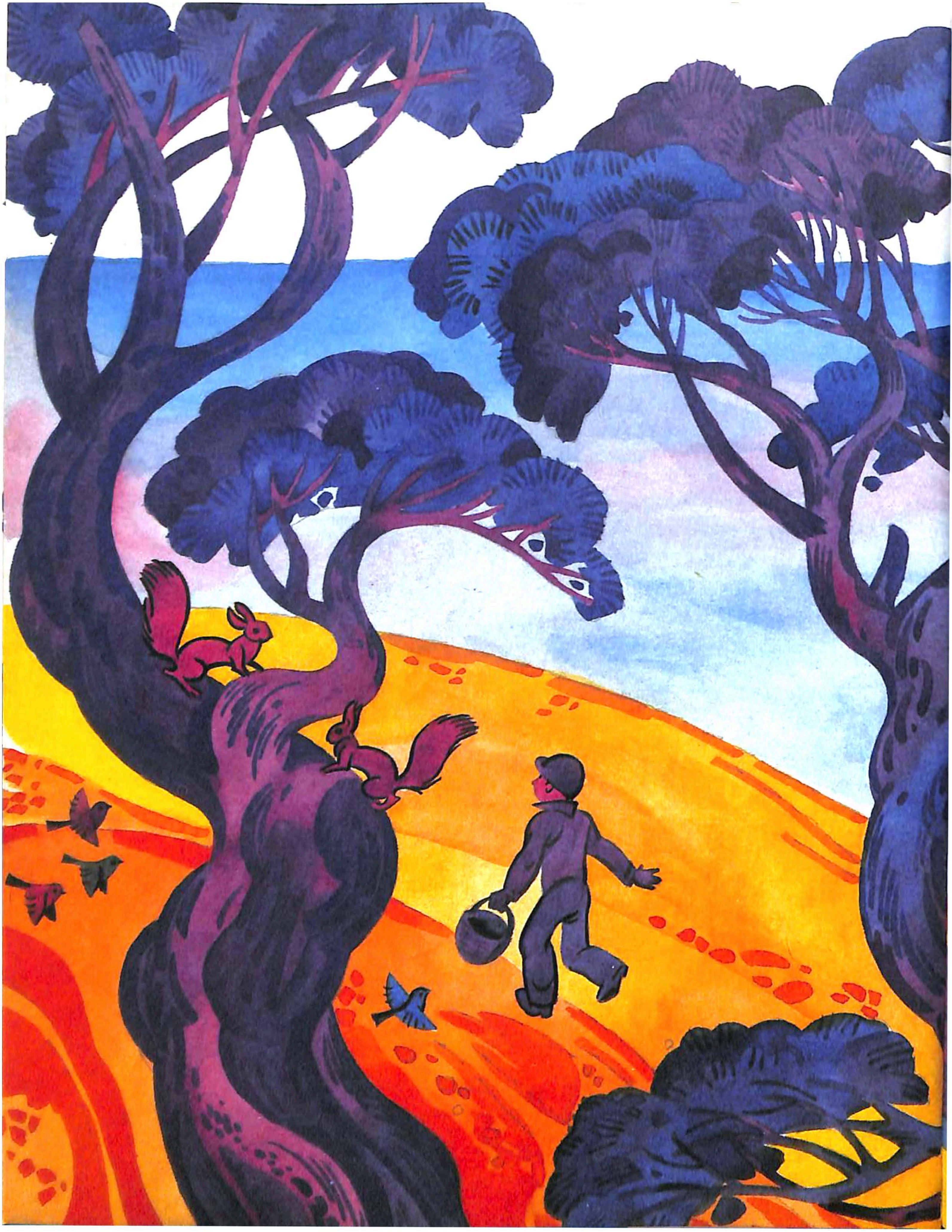


Wild Strawberries

The wild strawberries weren't ripe yet. It was too early. Who goes picking wild strawberries in the middle of June?

Yesterday in the courtyard Vilius had boasted extravagantly, "Tomorrow we're going picking wild strawberries. There's heaps of them on Grabsto point. We ate our fill of them today. We should have taken a bucket with us."

He held a glass jar, the bottom of which was covered with whitish and pinkish berries.



He thrust the jar under Romas' nose and even sprinkled a few wild strawberries into his palm.

"Go on, try them. I ate the red ones myself."

Romas sniffed the berries, said "Thank you" and timidly inquired, "Can I come with you?..."

"We'll see," grinned Vilius.

Romas did not eat the berries, but decided to give them to Danutė who had been ill for two days. She had a cough. Her mother wouldn't even let her go out to play. It was boring without her. Danutė was a nice girl, not like Rūta.

Danutė ate the wild strawberries and said, "They're nice. It's a pity there aren't any more of them!"

"I haven't got any more. I'll bring you lots and lots tomorrow. I'm going strawberry picking with the other boys," Romas promised.

That was yesterday.

But what happened today... Romas went to see Ignas and asked him when they were going strawberry picking. But Ignas just brushed him aside, "What wild strawberries?"

"Vilius told me that today you were going..."

"What does it matter what nonsense Vilius talks. Leave me alone!"

"But I promised Danutė..."

"What does it matter to me? If you promised, then go by yourself!"

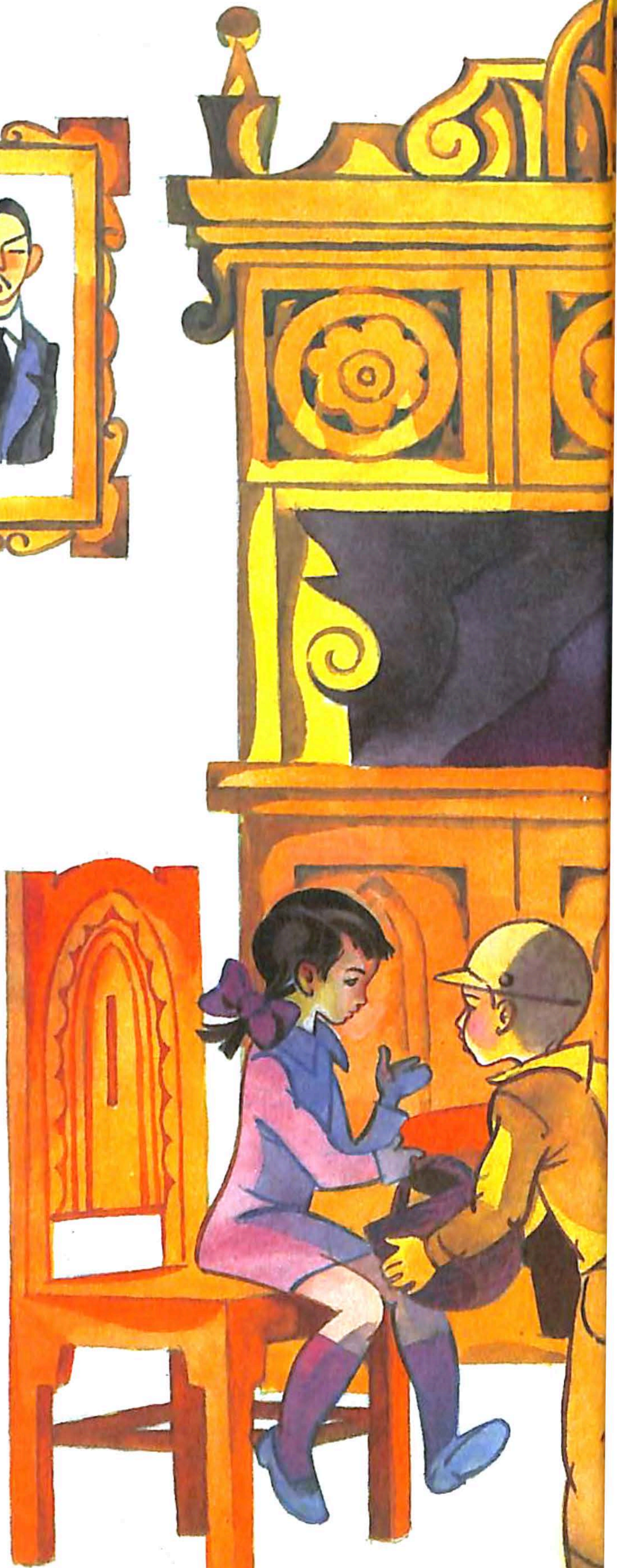
Ignas turned his back on him, thrust his hands in his pockets and strutted across the yard. When he reached the gate, he turned round and shouted, "Make sure you don't take all the ber-

ries, titch! Leave some for us!" He burst into laughter.

Romas just stood there thinking what he should do next but somehow no ideas came into his head. "You're a cheat, that's what you are. A person is ill, and you don't keep your promise to her... Shame on you, it's a disgrace!"

At home, when he had calmed down a bit and had drunk a glass of water Romas at last thought what he should do. I'll go on my own, he decided. I know the way. I'll pick the strawberries and bring them back.

No sooner said than done. Romas took a punnet and was soon striding along the damp edge of the shore. If he walked along the dry sand his



feet sank in, and if he went along the very edge of the beach where the waves had flattened the sand it was level and easy to walk on, just like asphalt. It was quite a long way to the point.

Romas did not know that the braggart Vilius had deceived him. The boys had not found any wild strawberries yesterday except that little handful of pink berries, and that was all. They hadn't found them on Grabsto point either, but in a clearing at the old aerodrome, in the sunniest spot...

The sun, which had slipped out from behind the fluffy clouds gave a little warmth. The warm breeze caressing the water hardly made it ripple. Romas walked on and on, never once looking round. When he got tired, he paddled in the gulf up to his knees and splashed his face with water. He rested for a while and then walked on to the point itself.

That wide and sandy promontory reaches out into the gulf. Young alders and birch trees grow there, and in the green glades there are always plenty of wild strawberries.

When he was walking through an alder grove, Romas frightened a hare that was sleeping sweetly. The little hare jumped up and ran in loops along the edge of the grove, the little speck of its white tail flashing.

"Don't be afraid, little hare!" Romas shouted to him. "I've only come to get some wild strawberries!"

But the hare did not stop. Either it did not hear, or it was so frightened it did not understand and hid itself in a nearby birch grove as soon as it could. In the glade beyond the little alder grove the wild strawberries were not ripe yet. In some places the side of the berry that had been turned to the sun was pinkish. But on the whole the berries were still hard and sour. There were a lot of them, but they just were not ripe. Romas entered the little birch grove and walked through it. Then there was another glade. The larks were singing high up in the sky. Romas craned his neck and listened. When he looked in front of him his heart missed a beat: he was so happy. The whole of the glade was scarlet with strawberries. The heady fragrance of wild strawberries hung in the air. Romas picked a little heap of strawberries, and his lips removed them from his palm. How sweet they were! It makes your mouth water! "No, to begin with I'll fill the punnet for Danutė," he decided.

He squatted down, then kneeled and then crawled across the glade on his hands and knees... He filled the punnet and covered the berries with leaves to keep them fresh. Then he recalled that he liked strawberries, too. He treated himself to them until he felt that there wasn't room for a single berry more. He'd actually eaten too many.

He rested for a while, then washed his hands and face in the seawater because they had become sticky from the strawberries and set out on the way home.

He returned home when the sun had almost set. His mother had been worried and even angry, but his Grandfather had reassured her, "I've told you before, nothing can happen to our Romas. That boy's got a good head on his shoulders. A person like him will never get into trouble! Well, sonny, what have you brought?"

"Wild strawberries."

"You can't have done. It's still too early for them."

"But at Grabsto point they're ripe."

"Come on, show me then. What lovely strawberries!"

"They're for Danutė."

"I say! That means you promised Danutė then. Well, you better take them to your little friend and cheer her up."

"Don't be long," added his mother.

"I'll take them right away!" Romas turned to his mother, "Oh, I'm ravenous!"

Danutė put her arms round the punnet and said cheerfully, "If I eat them, then I'll get better straightaway!"

At that moment Ignas looked in through the window.

"They say that Romas has brought you some wild strawberries..." He didn't finish speaking because he saw Danutė with his own eyes eating berry after berry from the punnet.

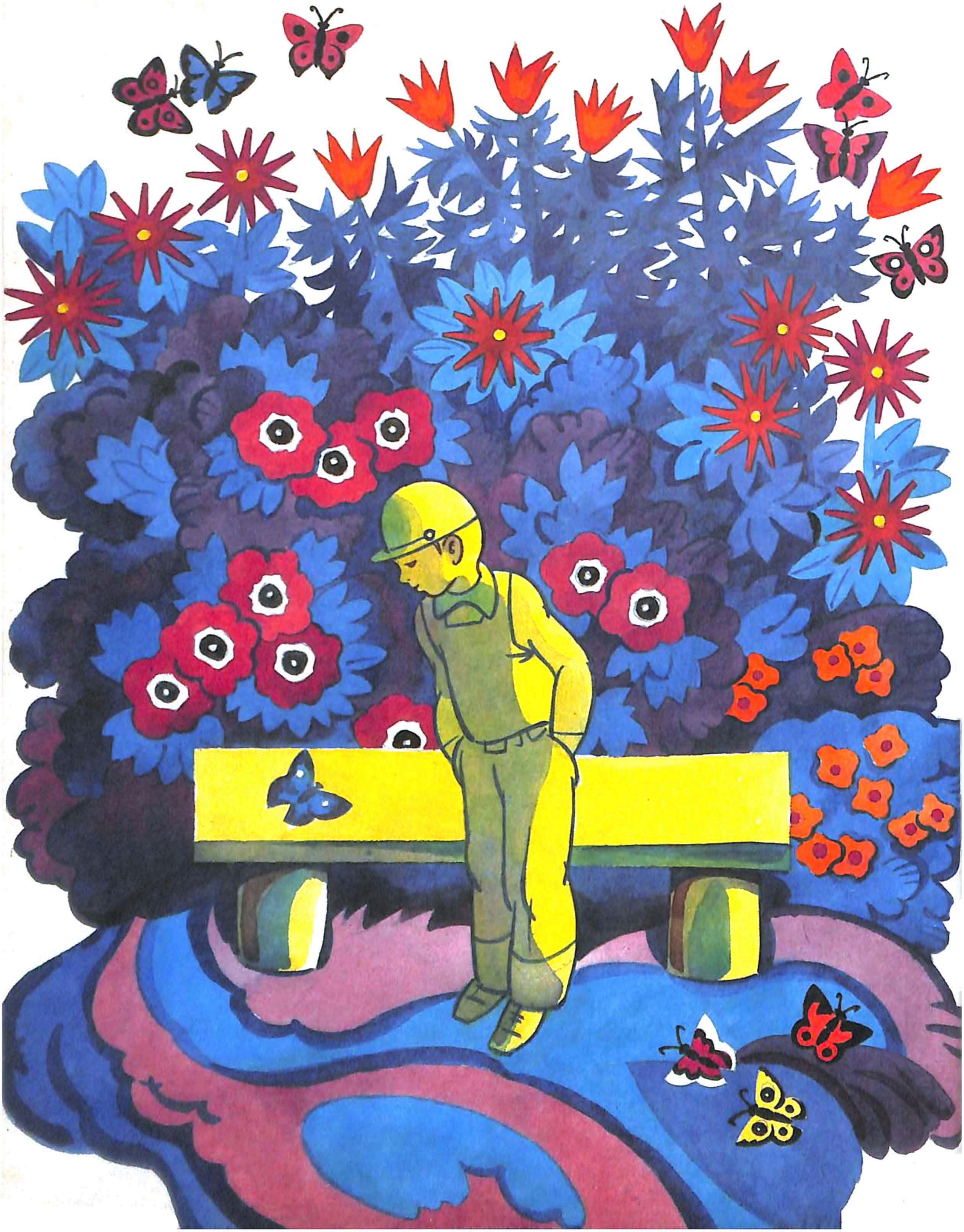
The next morning Romas went looking for the big boys in vain. He wanted to ask them to go to Grabsto point with him to pick some strawberries, but they had disappeared before dawn, and no one knew where they had gone to. They only returned home after lunch, tired and sullen. Vilius angrily ordered Rūta, "Come on now, go and fetch Romas!"

As soon as Romas appeared in the yard, Vilius snapped at him, "Why did you lie to me? The wild strawberries at Grabsto point aren't ripe yet!"

"I told the truth," Romas was offended. "You simply didn't look in the right place."

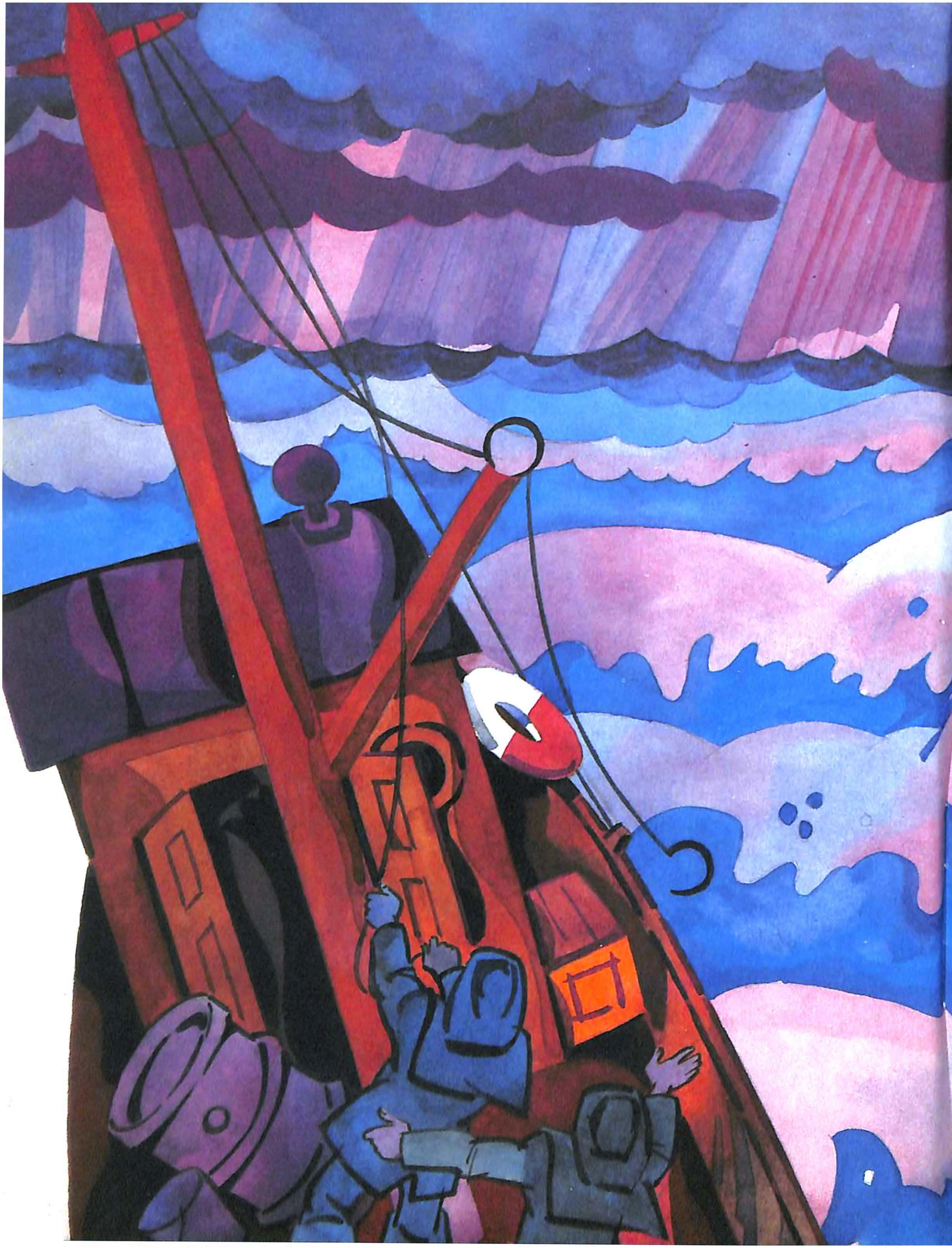
"We scoured the promontory from end to end."

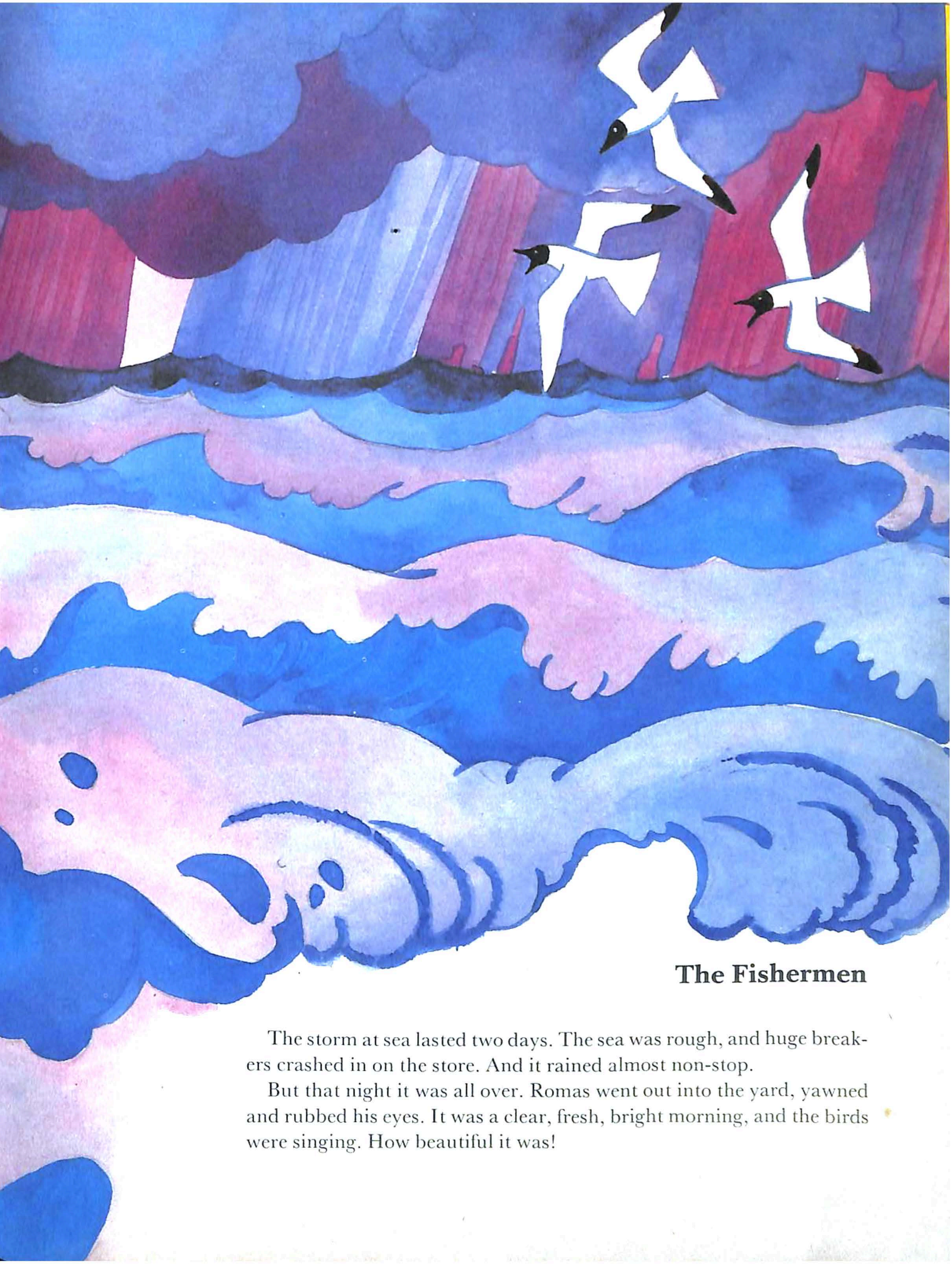
"But I found some, didn't I?"



Vilius frowned and muttered angrily, "I don't know where you found them, but not at Grabsto. Watch out! I won't forget the trick you played on us. Got it?"

But he hadn't played a trick on them, had he? He just happened to find the sunniest glade...

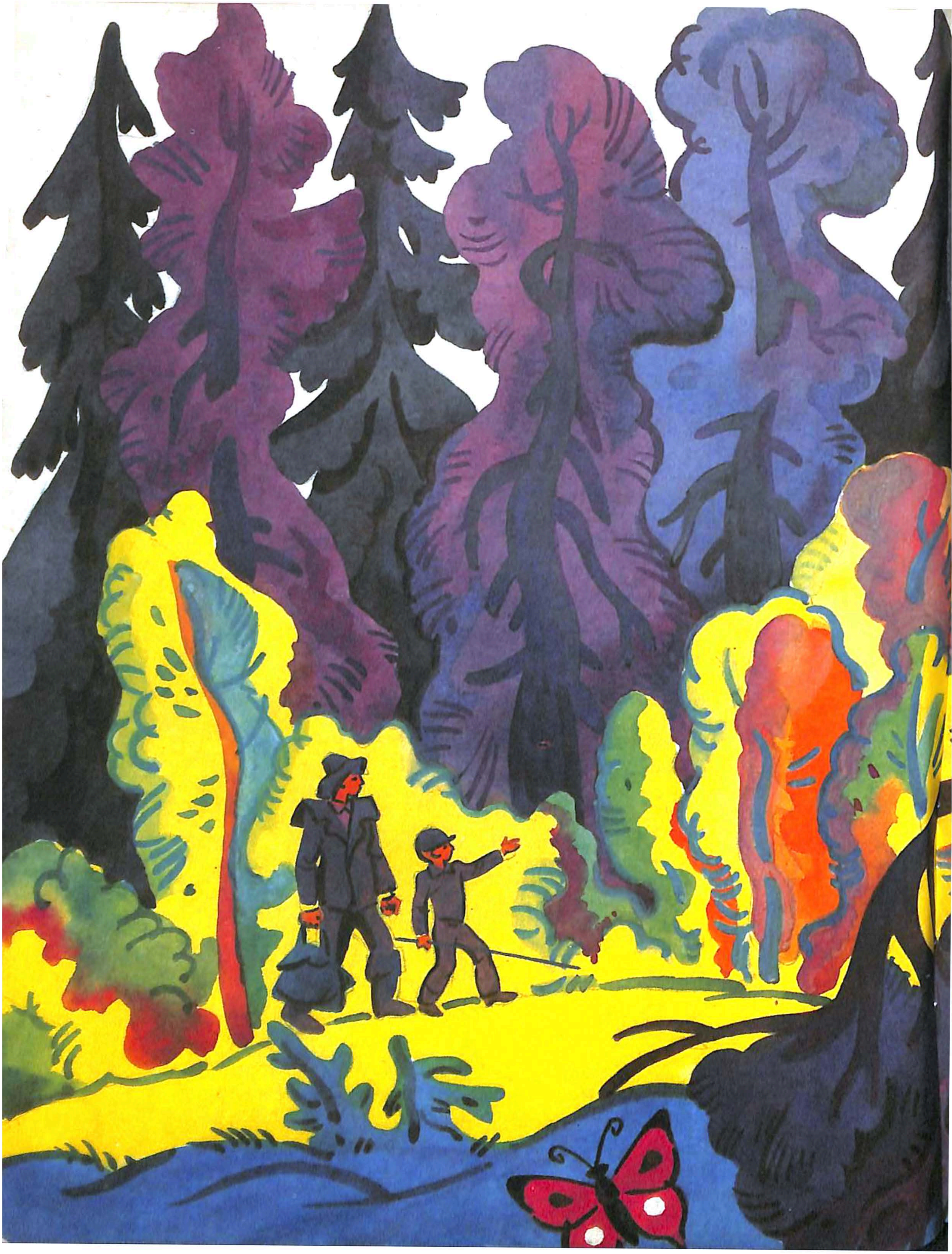


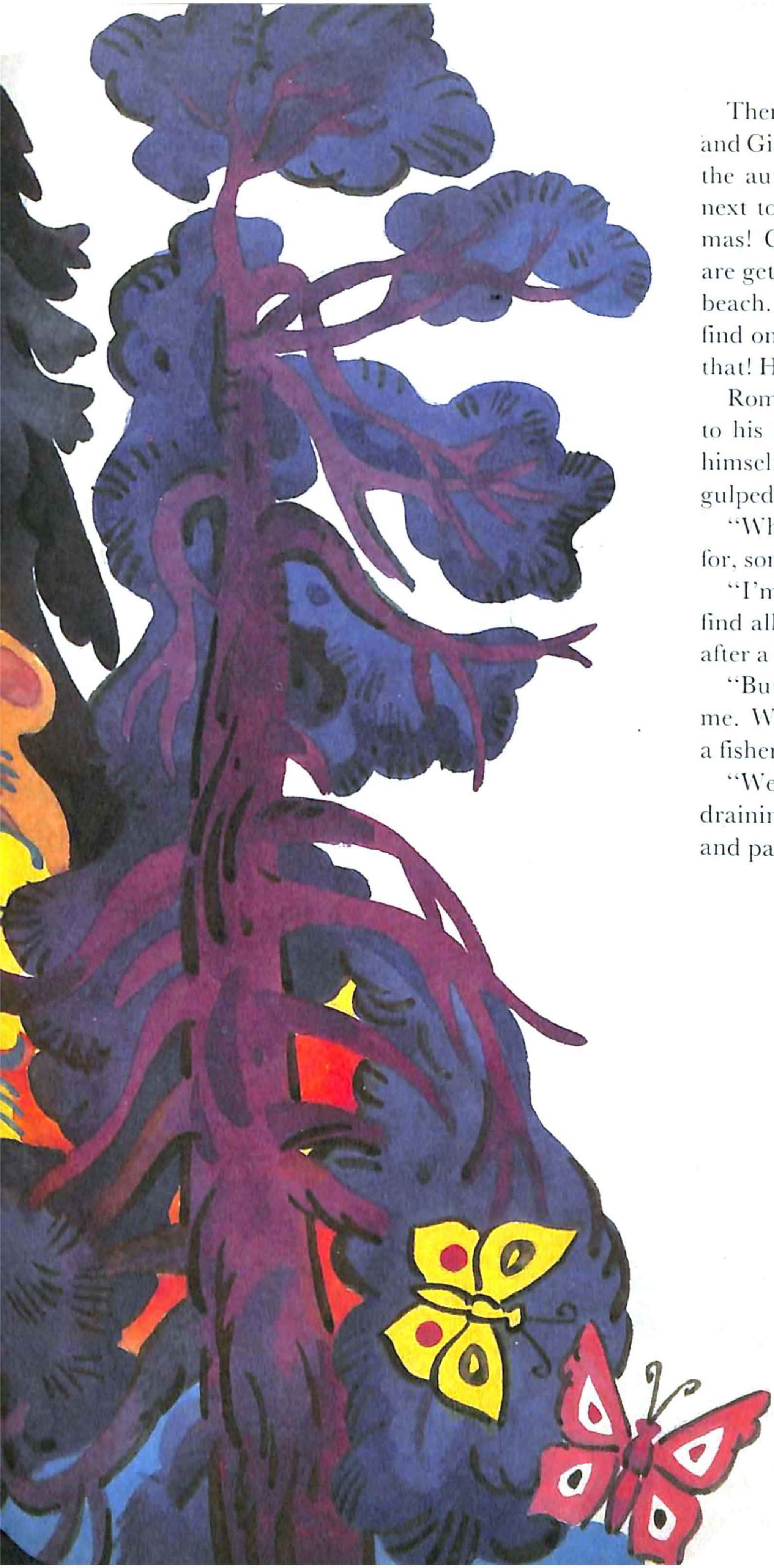


The Fishermen

The storm at sea lasted two days. The sea was rough, and huge breakers crashed in on the store. And it rained almost non-stop.

But that night it was all over. Romas went out into the yard, yawned and rubbed his eyes. It was a clear, fresh, bright morning, and the birds were singing. How beautiful it was!





Then Giedrius ran up to him (he and Giedrius were starting school in the autumn and had agreed to sit next to each other) and said, "Romas! Come on, quickly! The kids are getting ready to go down to the beach. You never know what you'll find on the beach after a storm like that! Hurry up!"

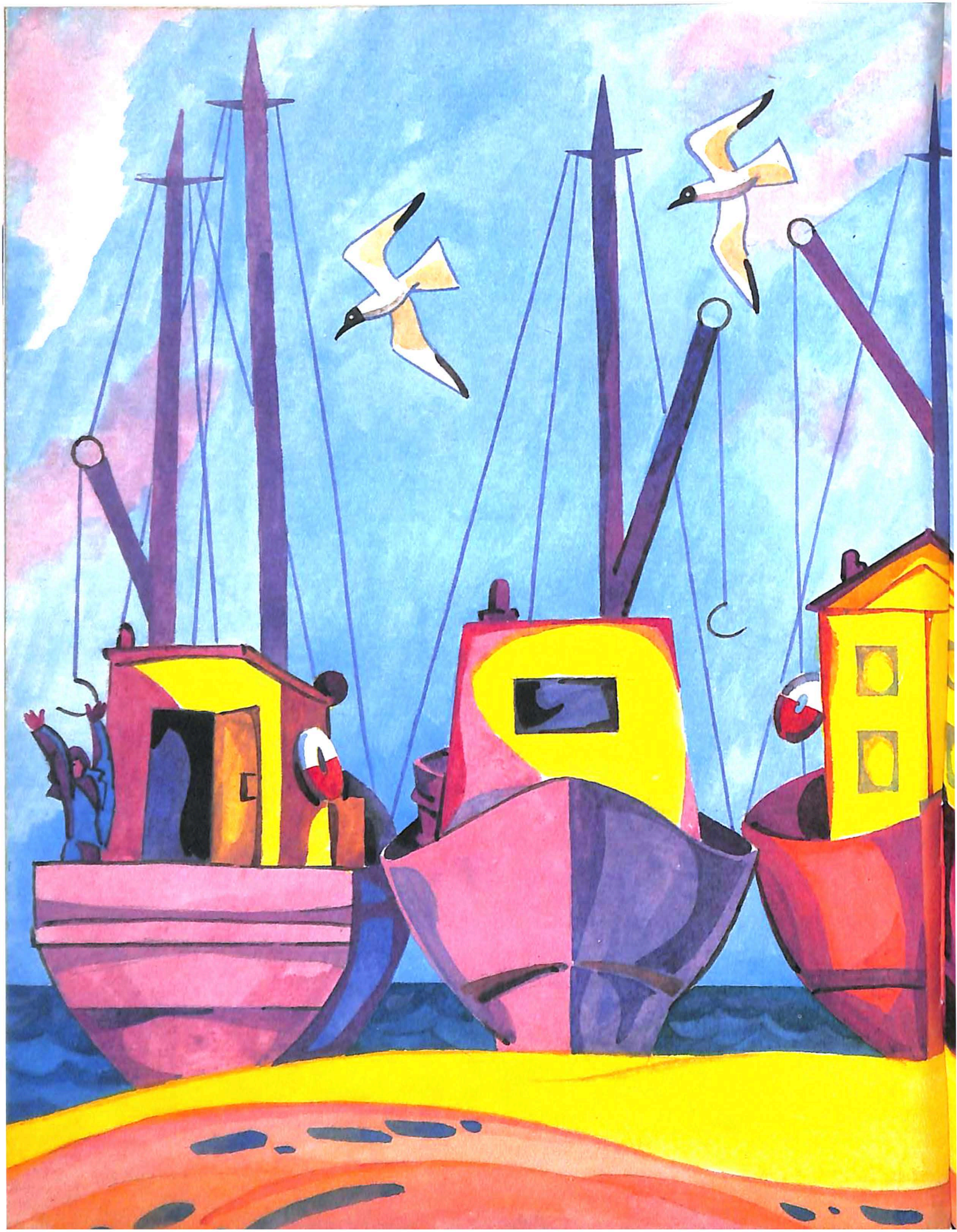
Romas crammed his breakfast into his mouth. He didn't even give himself time to chew it, but just gulped it down.

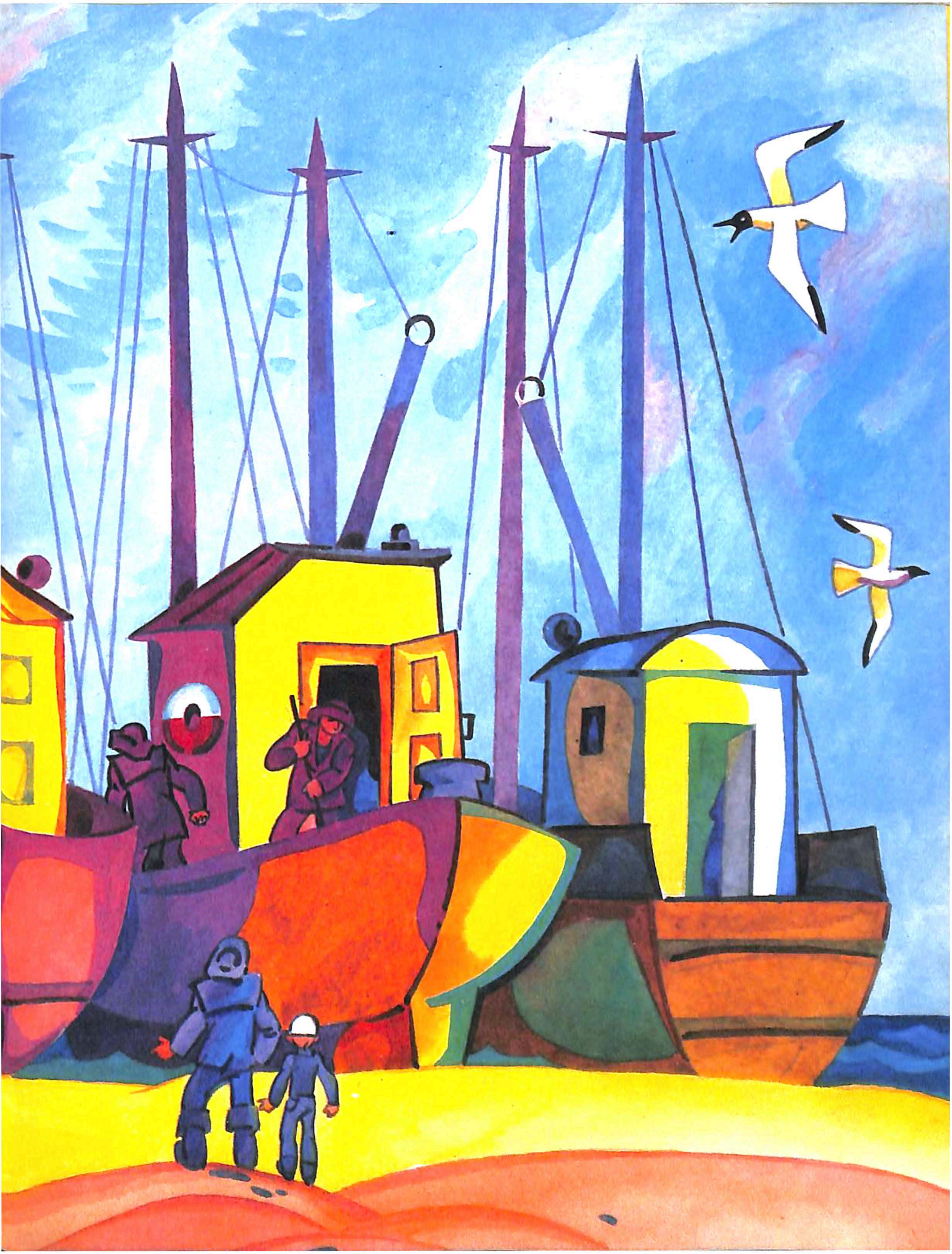
"What are you in such a hurry for, son?" asked his father.

"I'm off to the beach. You can find all sorts of things on the beach after a storm!"

"But you were going to come with me. Who said he was going to be a fisherman when he grew up?"

"Well, I did," replied Romas, draining his glass of milk in one go and panting.





"Then that means you can postpone your search till tomorrow. Today we'll put the fishing boat in order. It's full of sand and seaweed. We can't go to sea like that."

Romas scowled. He was displeased.

"What kind of fisherman will you be," grinned his father, "if you don't want to learn the fisherman's trade?"

"What do you mean, I don't want to. Of course, I do."

"Then let's go."

Romas had no choice. He had to go with his father.

On the eve of the storm the fishermen had returned with a good catch, and their boats were full of fish.

They had hurriedly returned to the shore by nightfall because the storm threatened to begin any moment. They hardly managed to unload the fish and drag the boats ashore before the downpour started.

Today Romas followed his father along the fishermen's path through the damp forest to the beach where the fishermen's boats were standing in a row. His father's boat was the outside one, with his dad's team in it. There was the motor-mechanic Eicinas, who was still a very young man, and the old fisherman, Uncle Kubilius, and Romas' father was their team leader.

"Ah, Romas has come!" shouted the motor-mechanic cheerfully. "Now, we'll get on with the work. Slide in beside me and we'll repair the engine."

Romas immediately climbed over the side of the boat, but Uncle Kubilius stopped him on the deck.

"You'd better help me swab down the boat, won't you?"

Of course, it was not nearly so interesting to wash the deck and the inside of the boat as it was to repair the engine, but he couldn't offend Uncle Kubilius, so Romas agreed, but somewhat unwillingly, "All right."

His father commented gruffly–you can never tell whether he's joking or not–"He's not interested in what we're doing. He'd rather mooch about on the beach, looking for some kind of rubbish. He wants to see whether the storm has thrown up some treasure for

him. No, our Romas will never make a fisherman!"

"We'll see about that," Uncle Kubilius winked at Romas. "We were going to put the boat in order, weren't we?"

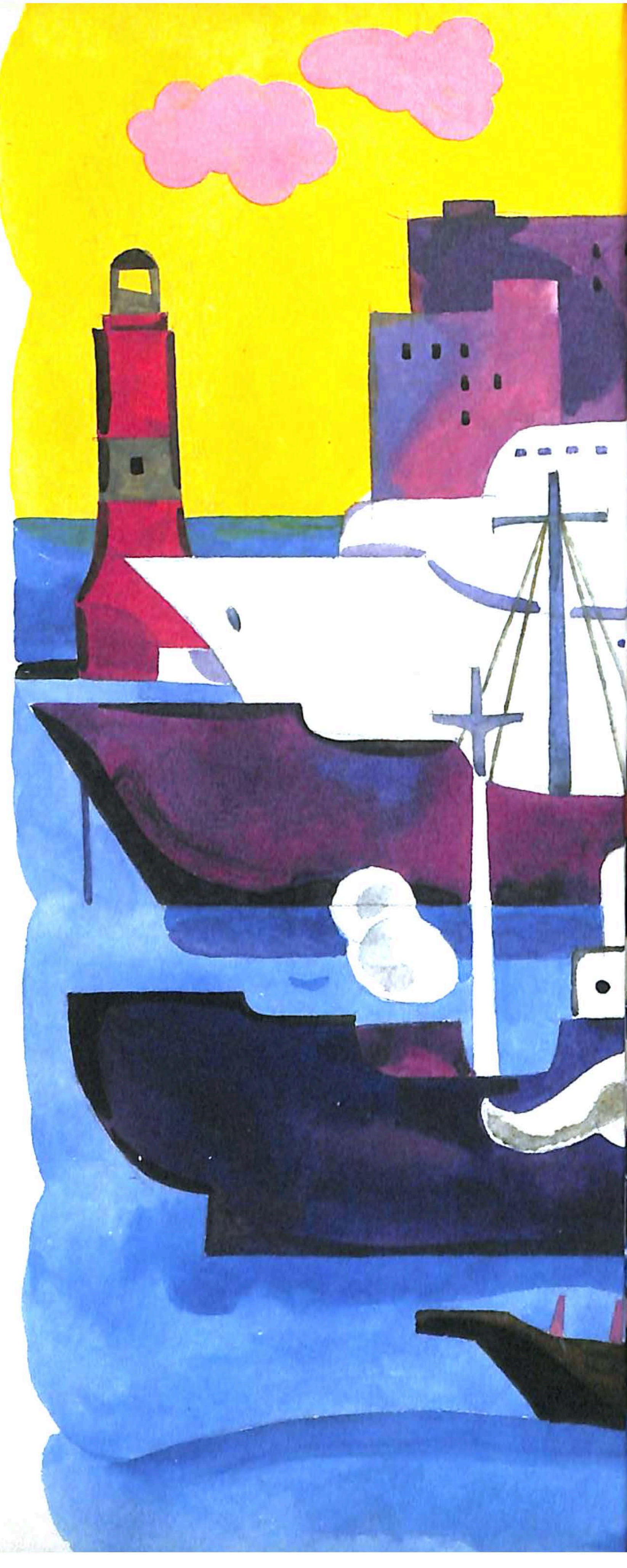
Romas did not need to be asked a second time. He immediately picked up the mop and set about the job. His father had really upset him. Surely it wasn't true that he was only interested in the different kinds of rubbish that the sea washed up. Not any more! Now he would show them. Romas put every effort into swabbing down the deck with the mop, scraping off the fish scales and seaweed. His father had even remarked in a worried voice, "Don't make a hole in it or we'll sink when we go to sea!"

"He won't do that, don't worry. He's just setting us a good example." Uncle Kubilius never let anybody insult his favourite.

The team went about the job as one man, mopping and scraping. Romas was wet with sweat. He even took his shirt off. The boat shone like new. It hadn't been as clean as that for a long time.

"Now we can have a rest," said Uncle Kubilius. He put down the cleaning rags and smoked his pipe.

Romas sat down beside him and looked out to sea. There was no wind, but the waves were still high. They broke into a mass of foam as they washed the shore. Never mind, the sea would be calm by evening, and the next day at dawn the fishermen would go fishing again.



Fishermen are brave people. The most daring of all. What is a fishing boat? Just a tiny little shell, but it goes far out to sea into the deeps. That's where the fishermen had to go to catch the big cod.

Eicinas adjusted the engine, and the motor hummed cheerfully.

"What are your orders? Out to sea, captain?" The motor-mechanic stuck his head out of the hatch and gave Romas a beaming smile.

"Okay. Everything's in order," answered Romas, and they all burst out laughing.

Everything was indeed in order. The fishing boat was clean as a new pin, and the motor couldn't be working better.

"You say my little fisherman worked well?" Romas' father asked Uncle Kubilius with a smile.

"It was a pleasure to watch the lad. If you don't believe me ask someone else. Martinas!" Uncle Kubilius called to the fisherman with the big moustache who was cleaning out the next boat. "What do you think, did the captain work well?"

"He did the work of three men," answered Martinas.

"There you are. And you said he was only interested in the odds and ends washed up by the sea," Uncle Kubilius reproached his team leader.

His father brought boxes of tackle onto the deck so that they could sort out and stow away the long, long lines with hooks attached to them on nylon leads. The leads had to be straightened out and made ready for fishing. There was probably at least a hundred if not two hundred of these hooks on each line. They all had to be clipped on in the right order so as not to get them muddled up. It was no simple matter!

Uncle Kubilius sat down next to Romas' father and started to sort out the line. He clipped on the hooks, straightened out the leads, and put the line in loops. He did it so quickly and skilfully. Romas also started to help him. True, he didn't manage to do it as well as Uncle Kubilius or his dad yet. But he tried as hard as he could.

"Listen," said Uncle Kubilius, "perhaps when we get through with this, you'll take me with you. Let's take a walk along the beach, and see if anything interesting was thrown up during the storm, shall we?"

Romas looked at his elderly friend without saying a word. He wondered if the old fisherman was joking.

"Have you lost your tongue?" smiled his father. "Go on!"

"Let's!" cried Romas.

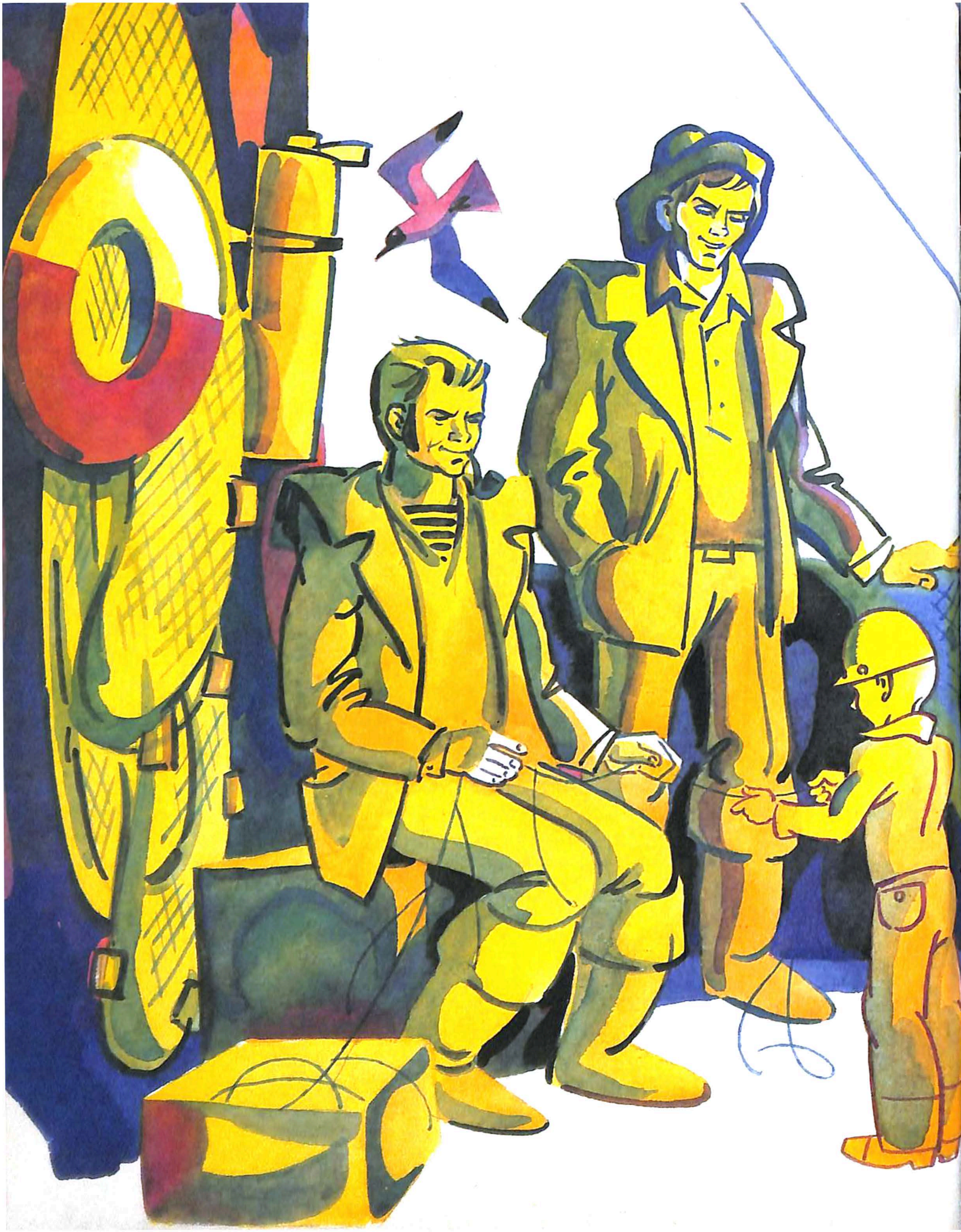
They all smiled again. Romas was so pleased he couldn't sit still. He was in such high spirits that he could have jumped overboard into the sea.

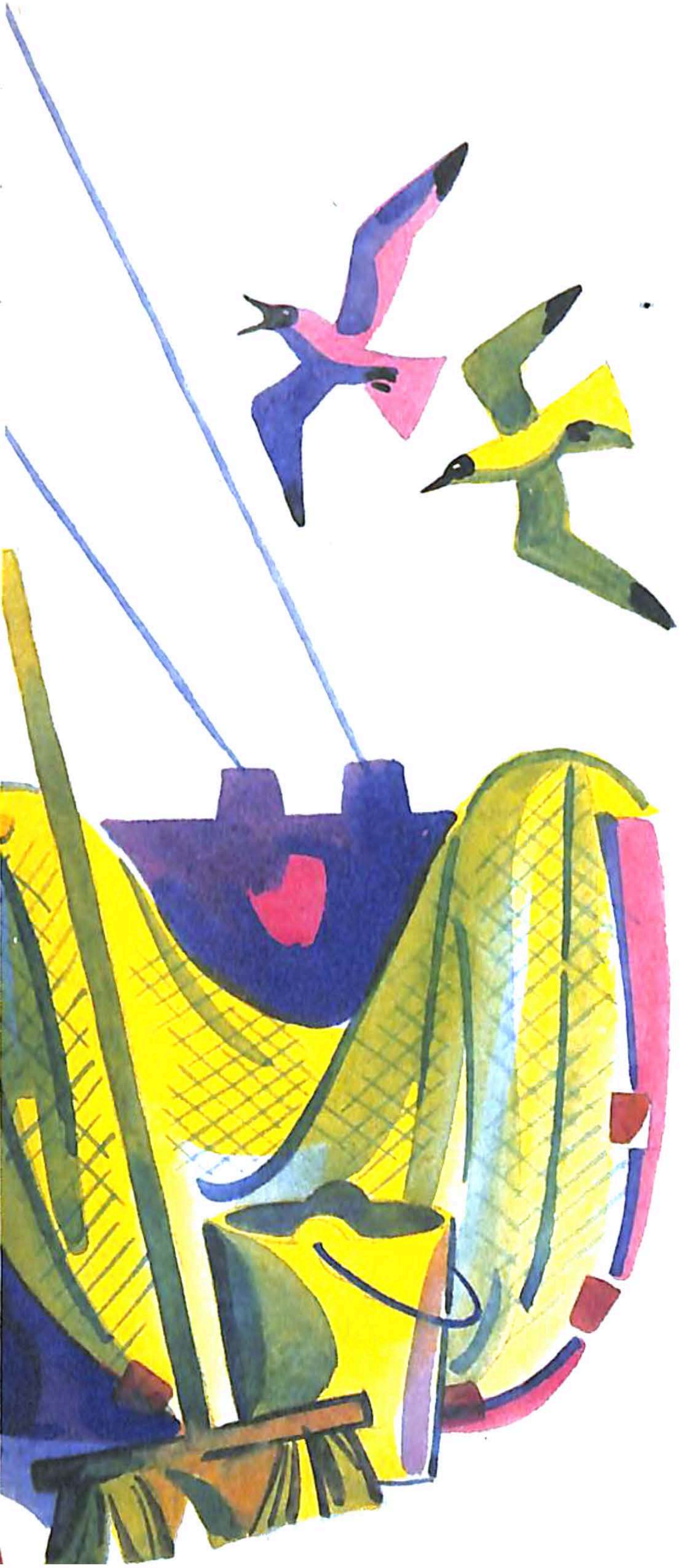
While he was untangling the lines, Uncle Kubilius pricked his finger on the sharp point of one of the hooks.

"Does it hurt?" inquired Romas anxiously.

"It's nothing! Fishermen are tough men." Uncle Kubilius squeezed out a drop of blood, rinsed his hand in the seawater, blew on his finger and then went back to what he was doing as if nothing had happened.

Then it was Romas' turn to be unlucky. He jerked the line clumsily and a hook pierced his thumb. Oh, how it hurt! Romas was on the point of crying, but he glanced at Uncle Kubilius. The latter looked at him with kind, serious eyes, as if asking, "Are you going to be tough like a fisherman?" Romas bit back his tears. He pulled out the hook, squeezed a drop of blood out, rinsed his hand in the seawater and blew on his thumb. Uncle Kubilius winked at him.

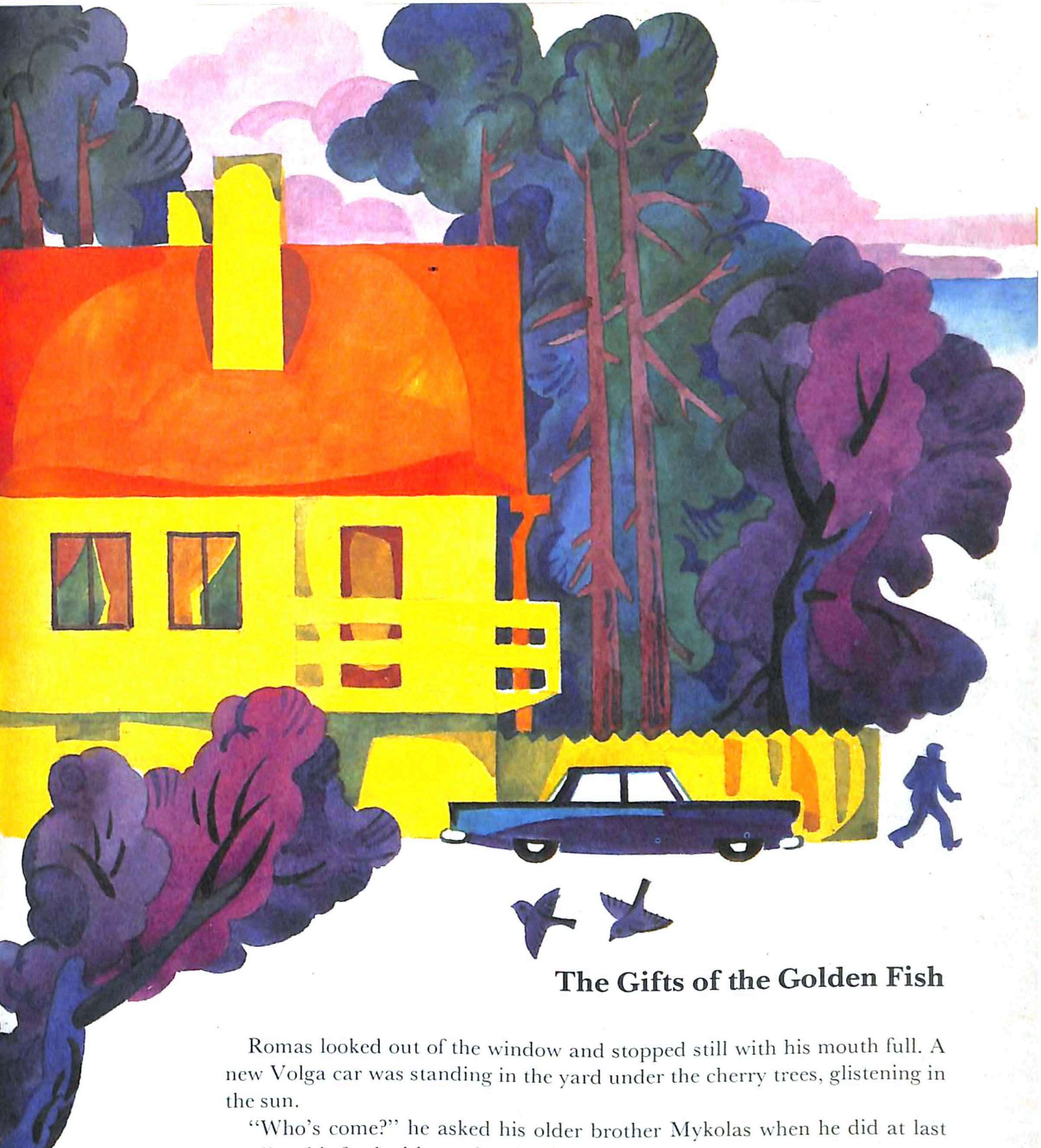




"That's right. When you grow up, you'll be a real fisherman!"

His father asked Eicinas to bring the iodine from below deck.

Romas felt the place where the hook had gone in, blew on his iodine-covered thumb once again and said, "Oh, it's nothing." Just like Uncle Kubilius.



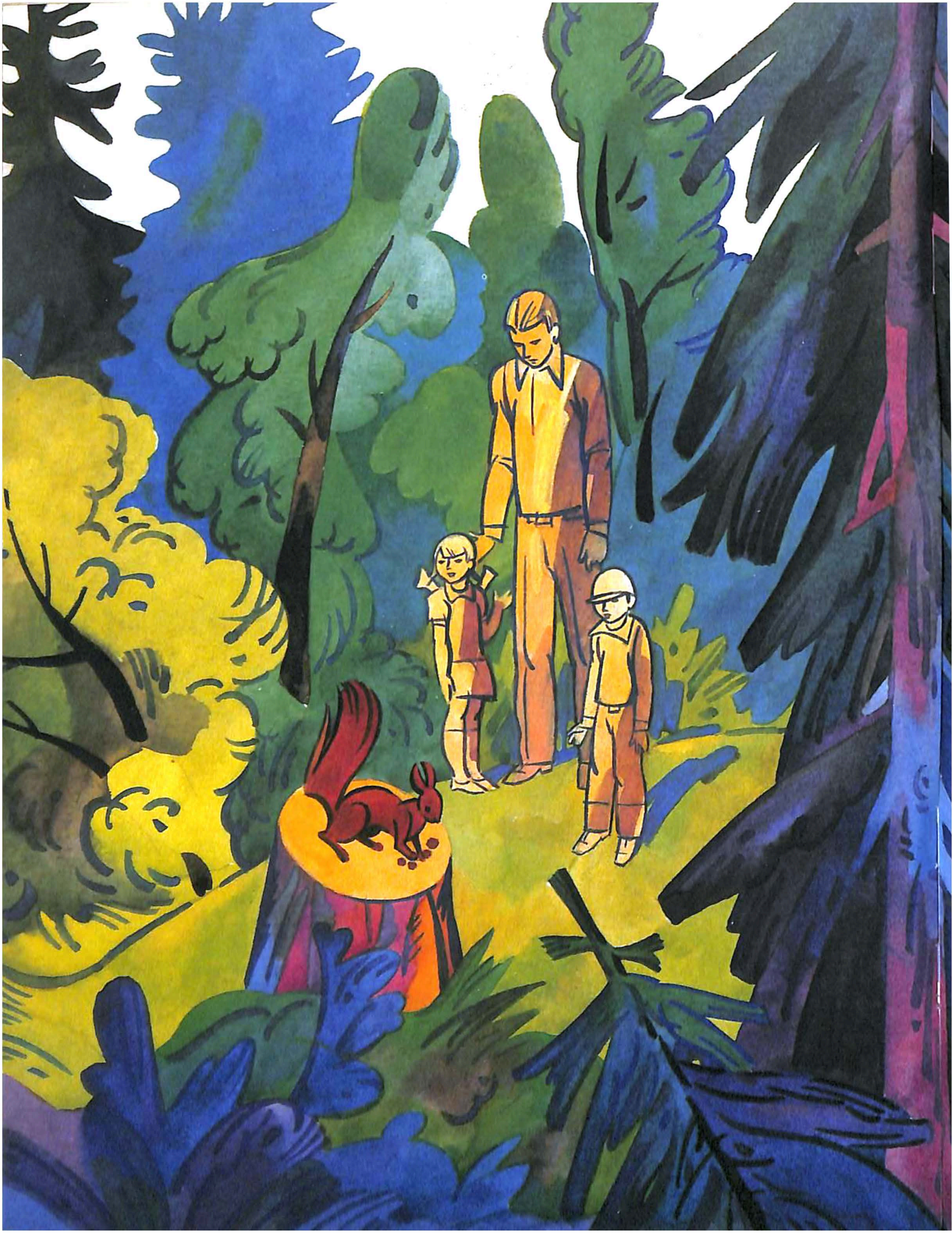
The Gifts of the Golden Fish

Romas looked out of the window and stopped still with his mouth full. A new Volga car was standing in the yard under the cherry trees, glistening in the sun.

"Who's come?" he asked his older brother Mykolas when he did at last swallow his food without chewing it properly.

"Danutė's dad."

What a nuisance! He and Danutė had agreed to go and look for amber today…



"We won't be able to go now, of course..."

"Why won't you be able to go?" resounded an unfamiliar voice.

Romas swung round and saw a tall, thin man standing by the doors as if he had sprouted out of the ground, and smiling at him.

"Why won't we go? Let's go!" He held out his hand to Romas. "Let's introduce ourselves. So, you're the lad who healed my daughter with wild strawberries?"

"That's right." Romas timidly shook hands with him, pressing his big palm.

"Well done. And I'm Danutė's dad."

At that moment Danutė peeped out from behind her father's back.

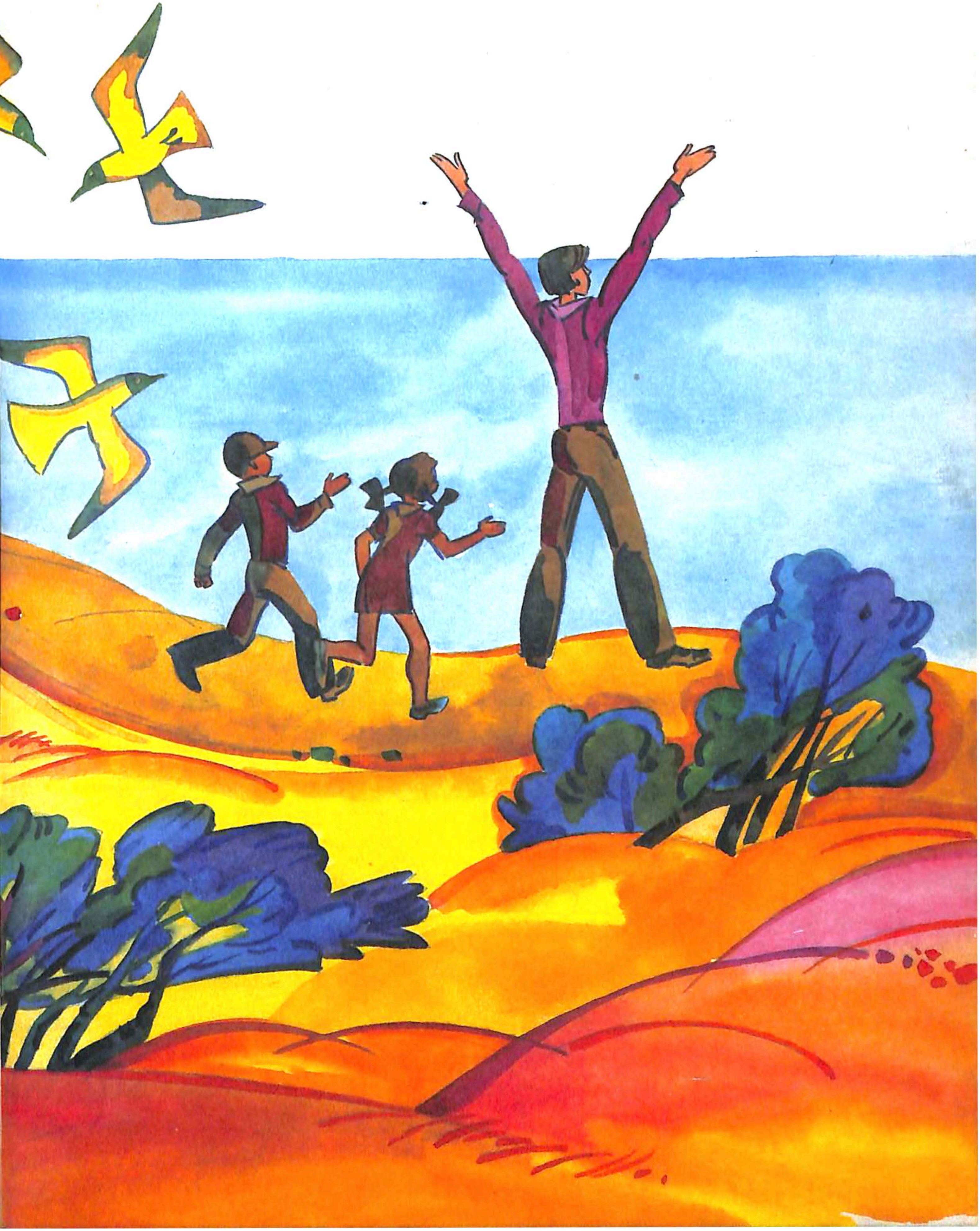
"Daddy, I've already had my breakfast. We can go."

"There's no need to hurry. Romas hasn't finished yet. And we can't go without him, can we?"

Romas cleaned up his plate and drank his milk like lightning. Then the three set out through the pine forest, where the sunrays were filtering through the branches.

"How nice it is here where you live," Danutė's father was carried away by the beauty of the spot. "The air's so lovely, too. Is it far to the sea?"

"Oh, quite a way," Romas answered proudly.



Suddenly a squirrel appeared as if from nowhere. It ran across the path in front of them. It clambered up a pine-tree and sat there, looking at them curiously.

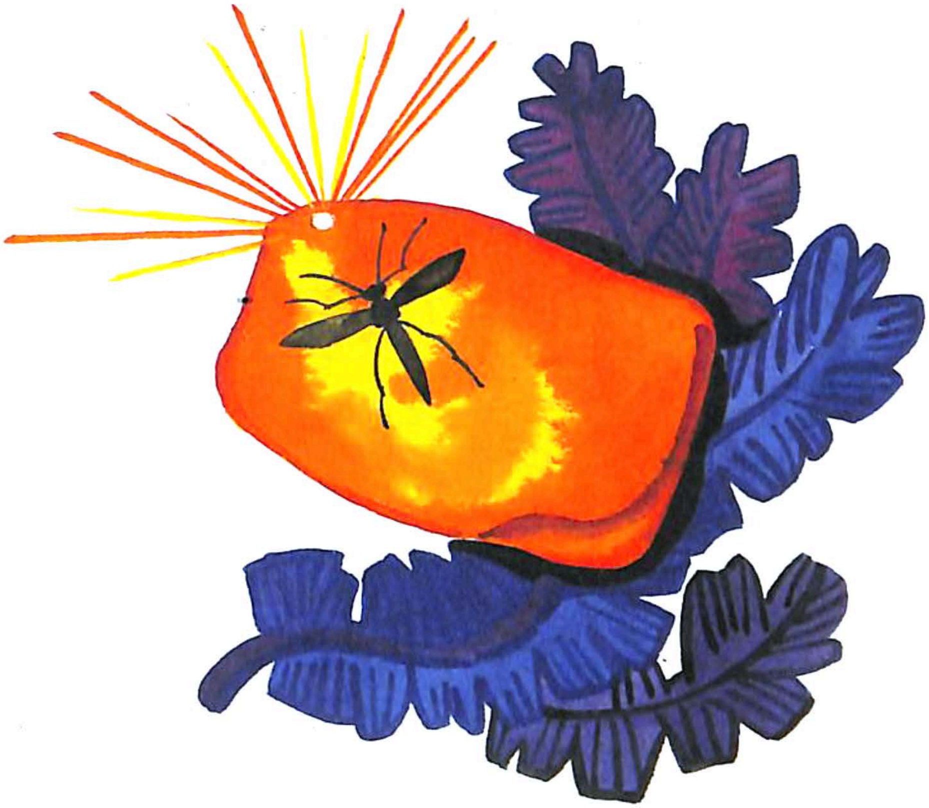
"Hullo, squirrel," Danutė's father greeted the squirrel. "Shall we give you something to eat? Would you like some nuts?"

Just like a conjuror, he thrust his hand in his pocket and pulled out a whole heap of nuts. He carefully put them on a little tree stump, took the children by the hand and led them to one side.

"But what about us?" Danutė asked.

"You? You can have some, too." Once again he fumbled around in his pocket in a knowing manner. "One, two, three!" and sweets appeared in the palm of his hand.

While the children were enjoying the sweets, the squirrel had plucked up courage and jumped onto the tree stump.



There were so many nuts there that it did not know which one to crack first. Sitting on its hind legs, its red tail fluffed up, it looked at the children questioningly.

"Eat your fill, squirrel! Good-bye!" Danutė's father waved to the squirrel.

"Only watch your teeth, the shells are hard!" Danutė warned and giggled.

They walked on.

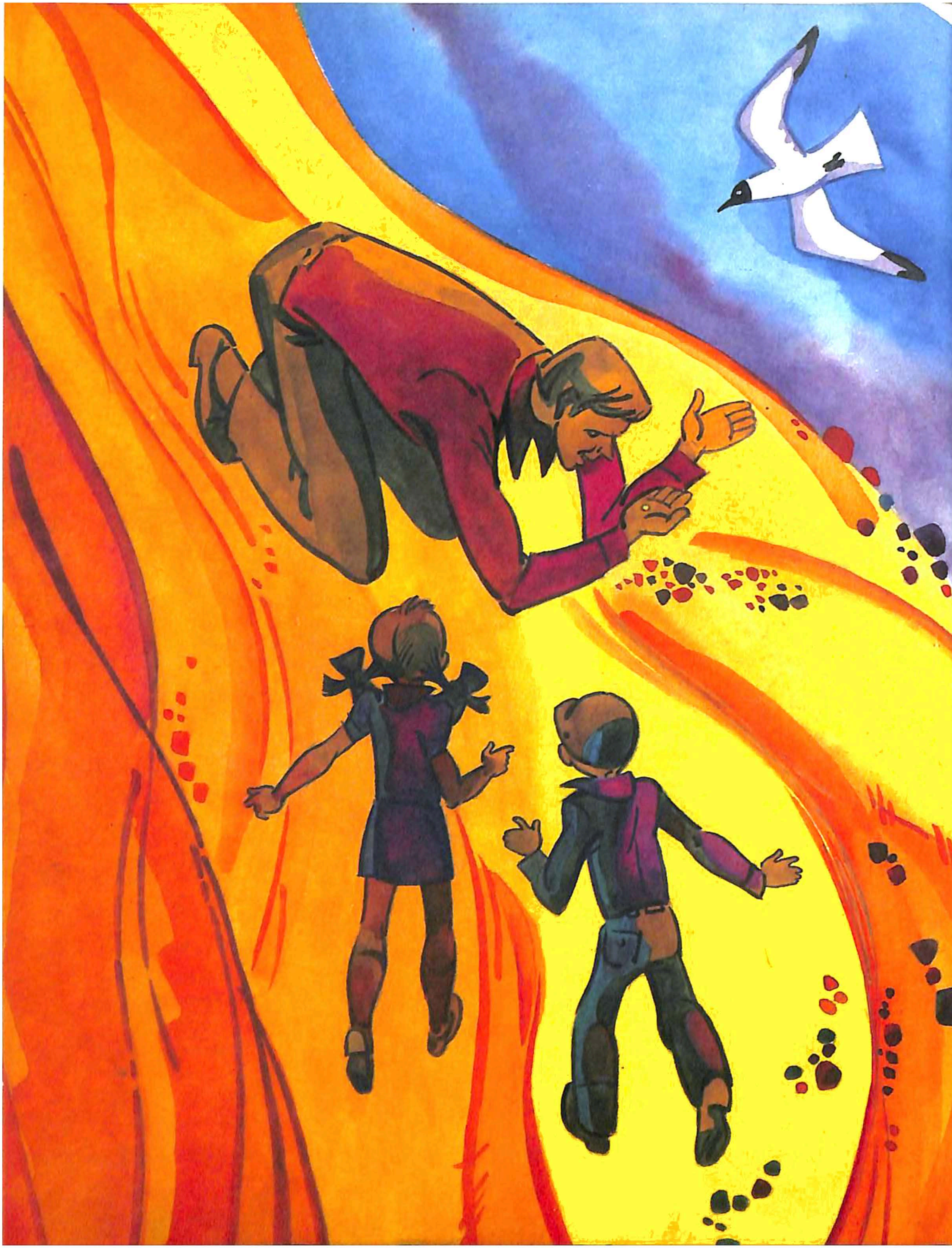
Romas knew the path down to the sea with his eyes closed. He couldn't possibly get lost. Everyone knew the way. You just had to walk straight ahead and you would come to the beach. At last, they espied the dunes against the background of the sea, which washed the endless sandy beach.

What a funny person Danutė's father was. Fancy saying hello to the sea.

"Good day, sea! Hello, gentle sea!"

"Sometimes it's rough, too," Romas added.

In actual fact, the day before the sea had been very rough. The strong wind had churned up the sea in a rage, whipping up great foam-tipped breakers. The waves had scooped up sand, shells, and seaweed from the seabed and thrown them up on the beach. Entangled in this seaweed like fishes in a net one could find little bits of amber on the beach, tiny pieces of ancient resin, which have become petrified, but are light and transparent. True, more often than not you only find tiny little pieces of amber on the beach, like little drops, and sometimes simply like dewdrops, slightly bigger than a grain of poppy seed. But you find a piece the size of your fist. A bright yellow transparent stone like a shiver of sunshine... After yesterday's



storm darkening heaps of damp seaweed were lying around on the beach and the odour of iodine hung in the air. Seaweed always smells of iodine.

"Come on, quickly!" cried Danutė. "Only I'll be the first to find some, mind." She raced over to the nearest clump of sea grass. She did so want to be the first to find a piece of amber. Danutė hardly had time to turn the sea grass upside down before she rejoiced, "Look, look here!"

Tiny grains of amber gleamed in her palm like little yellow rays.

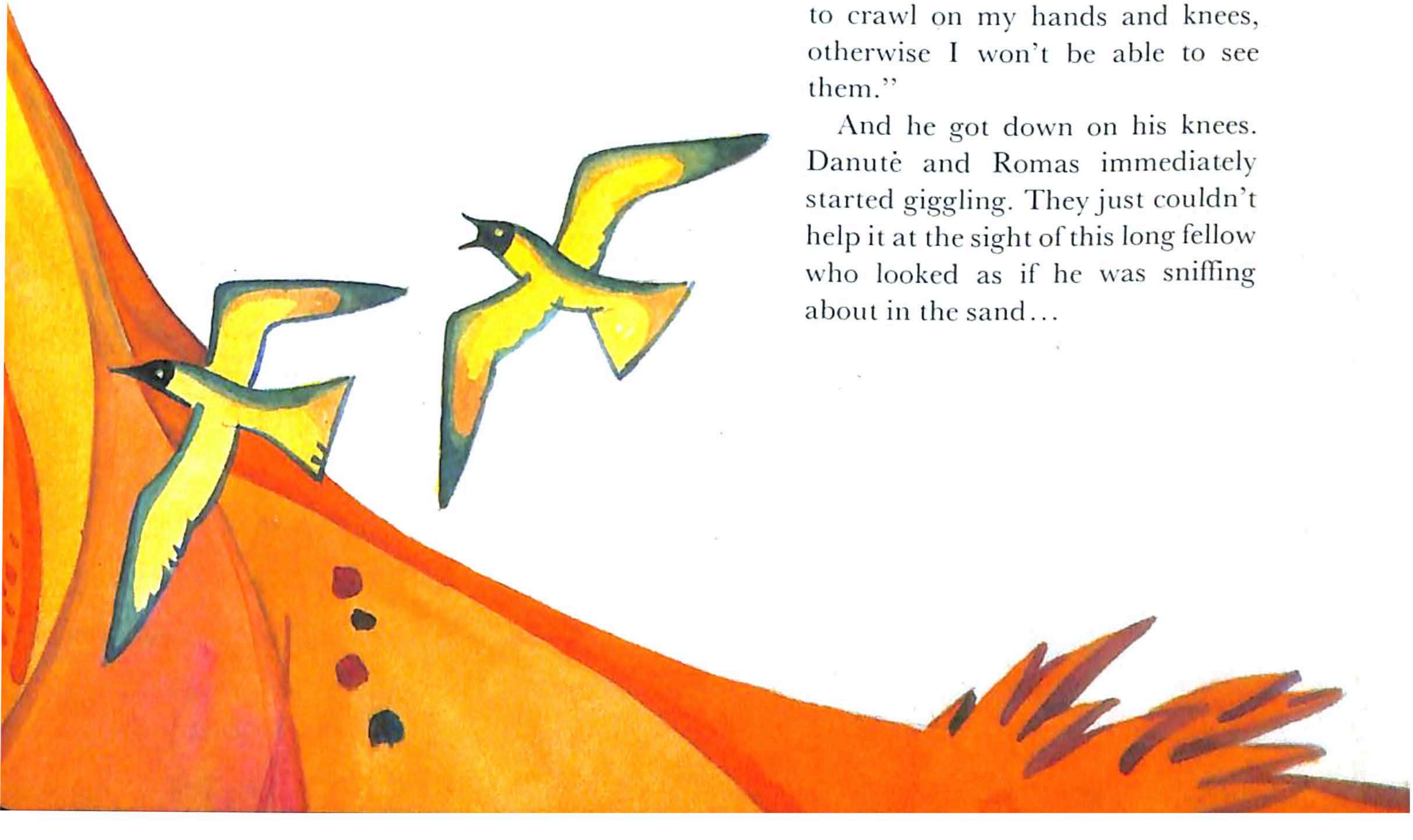
"What a find!" smiled her father. "You have to look twice to see them."

Danutė scowled. Why was he making fun of her little grains of amber.

"You just try and find bigger ones if you're so clever..."

"All right, I'll try. Only I'll have to crawl on my hands and knees, otherwise I won't be able to see them."

And he got down on his knees. Danutė and Romas immediately started giggling. They just couldn't help it at the sight of this long fellow who looked as if he was sniffing about in the sand...



Suddenly he jumped up and shouted so loudly that a passing seagull swerved to the side out of fright, "I've found some, I've found some."

Romas and Danutė rushed towards him, feeling sure that he'd discovered a really big piece. But little red, transparent grains lay in his hand... Danutė carefully put away his find into a matchbox. Since there weren't any bigger ones, those would have to do.

A little while later Danutė's father got up from his knees and rubbed his back. "Phew, it's hot. I'm tired. Perhaps we could lie down and have a rest?"

"You have a rest. We're not tired," answered Danutė.

"What about going in the sea?"

"You go for a swim. We'll collect amber."

"Go on then, you keep collecting it. Otherwise, when we go home, Mum will laugh at us. She'll say, 'Haven't you found anything better than that, after all that looking?'"

Danutė's father took off his shirt and trousers and sat there in his bright-coloured swimming trunks. At that moment Romas was turning another heap of seaweed over with a stick. Suddenly something bright flashed amidst the green. He could hardly believe his eyes. There amidst the pebbles worn smooth by the sea glowed a big, yellow transparent piece of amber, the size of a matchbox.

"What a piece!" Danutė stood spellbound. "Daddy, Daddy, come and look at this!"

"That's really a fine piece of amber. Even I can see that," Danutė's father shook his head in surprise.

Romas was rolling his find backwards and forwards in his palm, looking at it from all sides.

"Look how lovely it is," sighed Danutė enviously and cautiously touched the amber.

"You have it." Romas held out the piece of amber to her.

Danutė looked at her father as if asking him whether she should. But Romas insisted. "Go on, you have it. I don't mind. I'll find another one for myself."

"Today?" asked Danutė.

"Perhaps another time, but I'll find one anyway. Please take it." He almost forced the amber into her hand.

"Thank you," whispered Danutė, hardly able to believe her good fortune.

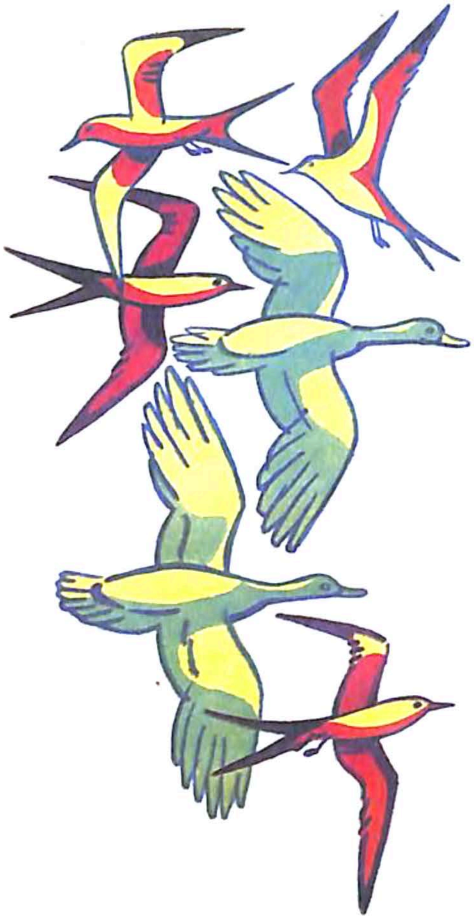
"You know," said Danutė's father seriously, "I don't often meet fine lads like you!" He patted Romas on the shoulder and ran down to the water.

He swam far out to sea and then dived down and did not appear on the surface again for a long time. Danutė even began to worry about him. But her father came up and swam towards the shore. They couldn't hear what he was saying for the noise of the waves. When he swam in quite close, the children heard his calling them. "Come here! I've caught a golden fish. It wants me to let it go."

His hands were cupped and he kept dipping them in the water. The children ran down to the sea, getting their pants wet because the waves rolling backwards and forwards up the beach, splashed them. Danutė's father showed them the fish.

"It really is golden!" cried Danutė.

"Well, poppet, make a wish quickly. The little fish will grant any wish."



"I want a doll, one that talks and closes its eyes," Danutė blurted out.

"What about you, Romas? What's your wish?" Danutė's father withdrew his cupped hands from the water and pressed his ear to them. "Do you hear? It'll grant all your wishes if only you'll let it go soon."

Romas looked at him distrustfully and said very hesitantly, "I'd like a ball... Like the ones in our shop. Red rubber ones with tiny knobs on their surface. They're good for playing football with."

"Well, what do you think? Will the fish keep its promise?" asked Danutė's father, releasing it.

"It will, it will!" said Danutė, slapping the water.

Romas wasn't so sure about that. How on earth had Danutė's father managed to catch a fish like that? Why hadn't his father or the other fishermen ever caught one like it? Perhaps it had swum here from distant seas? He would have to ask his brother Mykolas whether there really are such things as golden fish. His brother ought to know because he caught all kinds of fish in faraway seas on his trawler.

When Romas asked his brother about it, Mykolas replied seriously, "Of course there is! Haven't you ever heard the story how an old man caught a golden fish, and it spoke to him in a human voice. It said, 'Put me back, old man, into the ocean... I will give you whatever you ask me.'* If your wish comes true your fish was a golden one. You just wait and see!"

Romas had hardly opened his eyes the next morning when his mother came in and stood by his bed, saying, "Get up! Look what I found by the front door!"

Romas saw that it was a ball, but not some kind of rubber ball with tiny knobs, but a real leather football. There weren't any like that in the shop. You could only get those in town.

"Surely the fish didn't bring it?..." smiled Romas mistrustfully.

"Of course."

"What did Danutė get?"

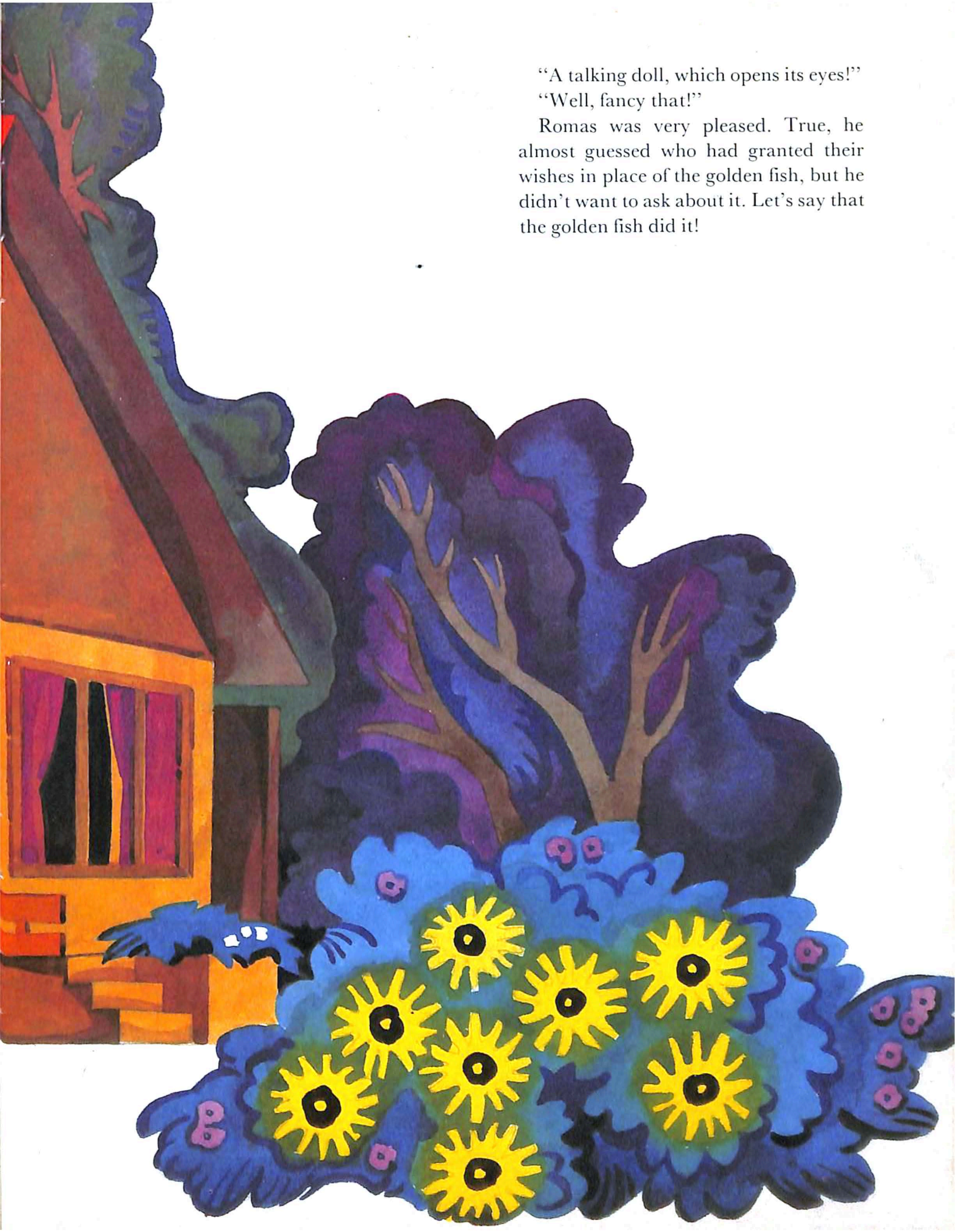
---

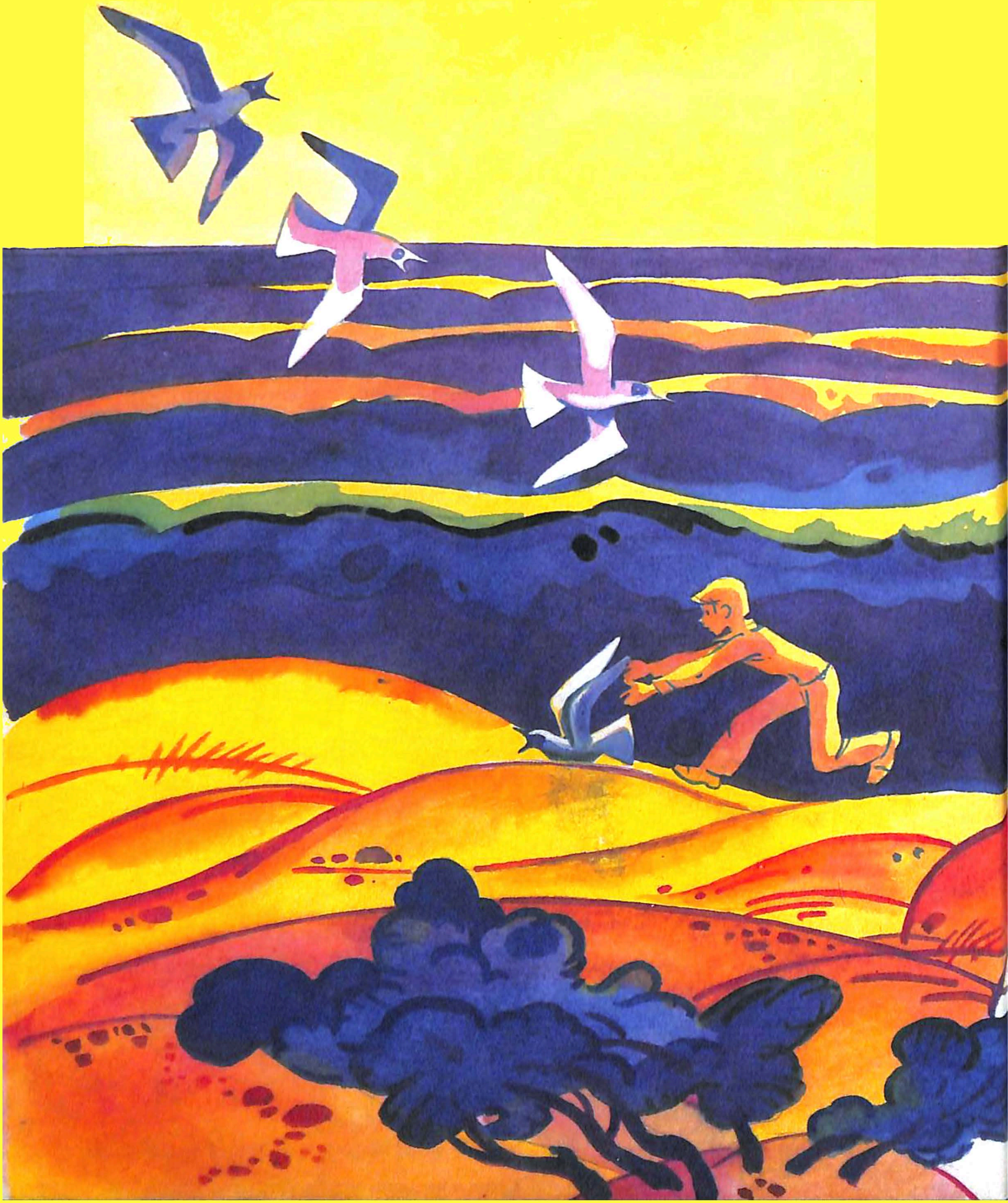
* Alexander Pushkin, **Fisherman and the Goldfish.** Translated by Louis Zelikoff

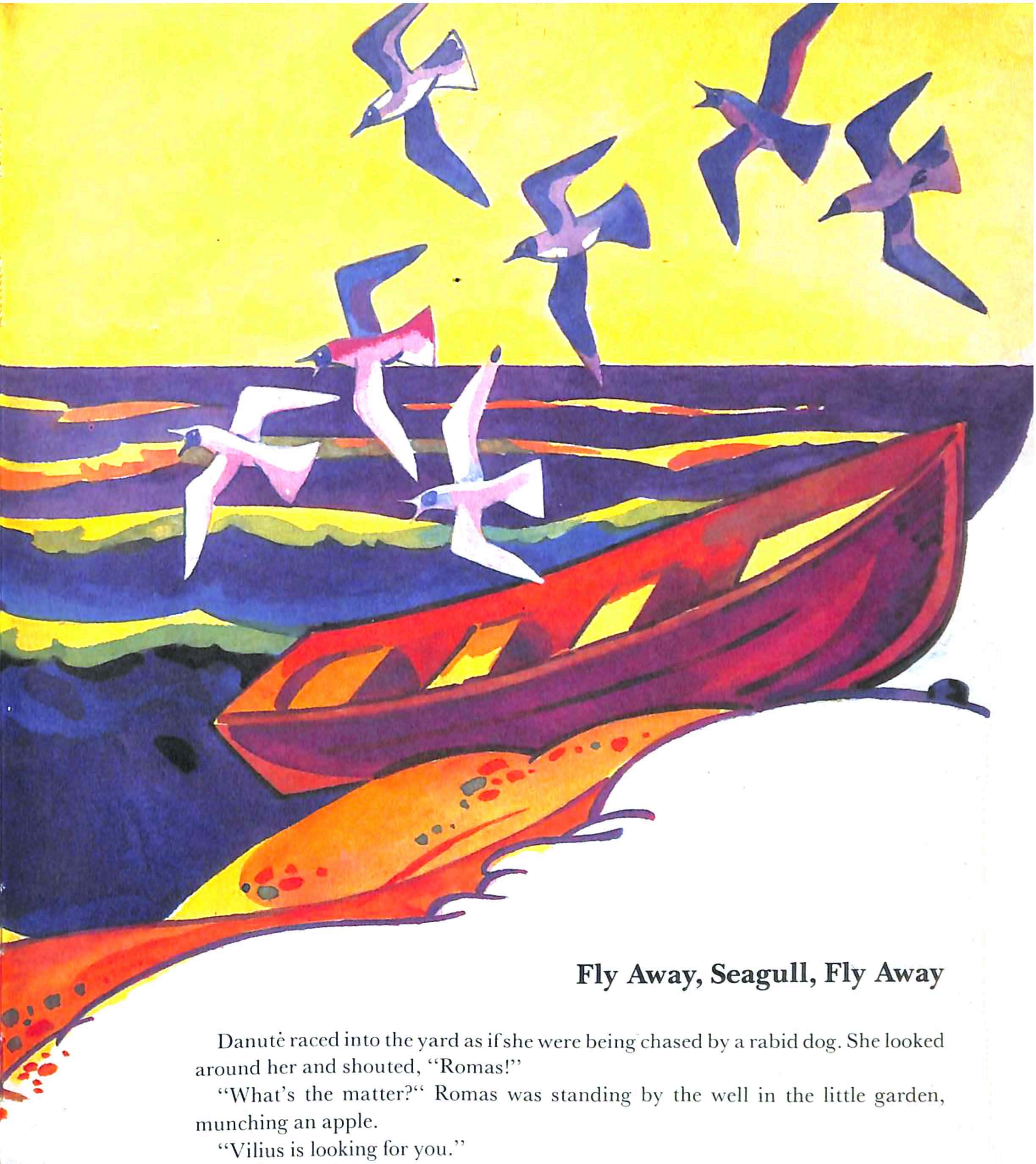
"A talking doll, which opens its eyes!"

"Well, fancy that!"

Romas was very pleased. True, he almost guessed who had granted their wishes in place of the golden fish, but he didn't want to ask about it. Let's say that the golden fish did it!







Fly Away, Seagull, Fly Away

Danutė raced into the yard as if she were being chased by a rabid dog. She looked around her and shouted, "Romas!"

"What's the matter?" Romas was standing by the well in the little garden, munching an apple.

"Vilius is looking for you."

"What does he want?"

"He's got a seagull."

"What kind of seagull?" Romas made a wry face because the apple was very sour.

"A young one. Its wing is broken. Can I have an apple, too?"

"Here you are!" Romas picked an apple off the branch and held it out to Danutė. "Only they're sour, you know."

Once she'd had the apple and had got her breath back, the little girl began to explain to him calmly, "He wants to sell you that seagull, you see. Let's go!"

The fact is that Romas had unexpectedly been given a brand new rouble by his brother Mykolas, a whole rouble. "Keep it," said Mykolas, "and you can buy yourself some ice-cream." Naturally Romas had boasted to the other children that he had a silver rouble. Vilius' eyes had shone and he had called him a liar. Then Romas had stuck the rouble right under his nose for him to see.

Vilius was beside himself with envy. What did that titch need a rouble for? He would probably spend it on some trifle. Whereas he, Vilius, knew how to put such a sum to good use. He could, for instance, buy a whole ball of nylon fishing line. Then he would cut it into lengths and swap it with the other children for all kinds of interesting things... No, he had to get that rouble off Romas somehow or other. But how could he do it?

For two whole days Vilius racked his brains, but he couldn't think of anything.

Today he had caught an injured seagull on the beach by the gulf. He decided to see if his idea would work. He told Danutė to go and fetch Romas, and he himself sat down on an overturned boat and waited. His calculations had been correct. Romas and Danutė flew down to the gulf like a shot.

Vilius was sitting on an old boat full of holes, holding the seagull. As soon as Romas walked up to him, Vilius showed him the seagull and asked, "Do you want to buy it?"

The seagull's eyes were frightened, imploring as if they were begging for help.

"Don't squeeze it like that," Romas said. "You must be hurting it!"

"And who broke the poor thing's wing?" Danutė stretched out her hand to stroke the seagull, but Vilius struck her across the fingers.

"Don't touch!" Again he addressed Romas, "Hurry up and bring me your silver rouble and you can do what you like with it. If you heal its wing, you'll have your very own pet seagull."

Romas was sorry for the bird.

"Can it be healed?" he asked.

"A trifling matter. Well, as you like. Take it or leave it. I've no time to stand around arguing with you."

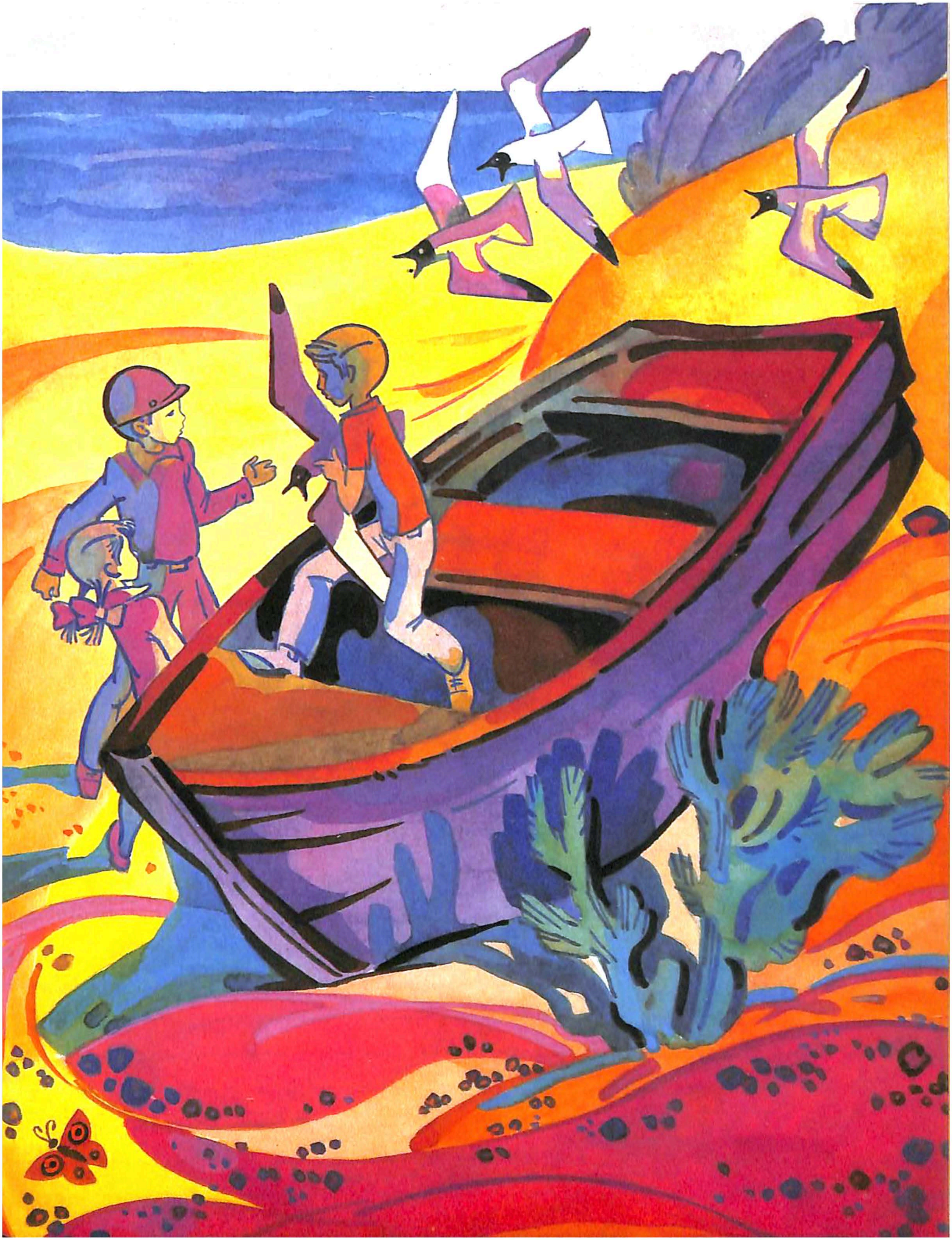
"Buy it," whispered Danutė, almost in tears. She too was sorry for the gull. "Buy it and we'll make it better. I'll help you."

But even so, Romas couldn't decide whether to or not, because he thought he might need the rouble for something else.

"So, you begrudge your little old rouble?" Vilius made fun of him. "Or are you going to buy it?"

"I'll take it!"

"Well then, go and get your rouble!"



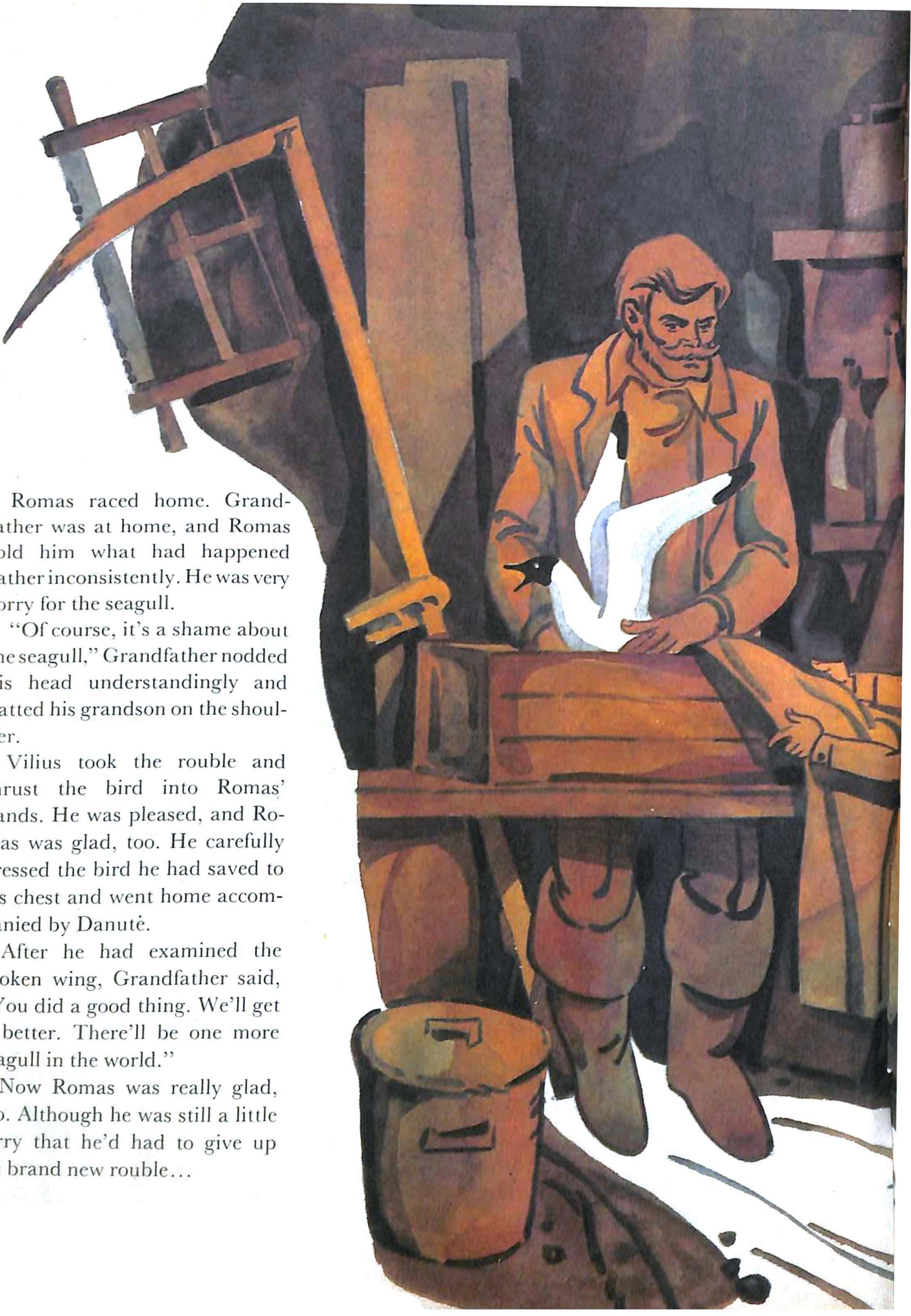
Romas raced home. Grandfather was at home, and Romas told him what had happened rather inconsistently. He was very sorry for the seagull.

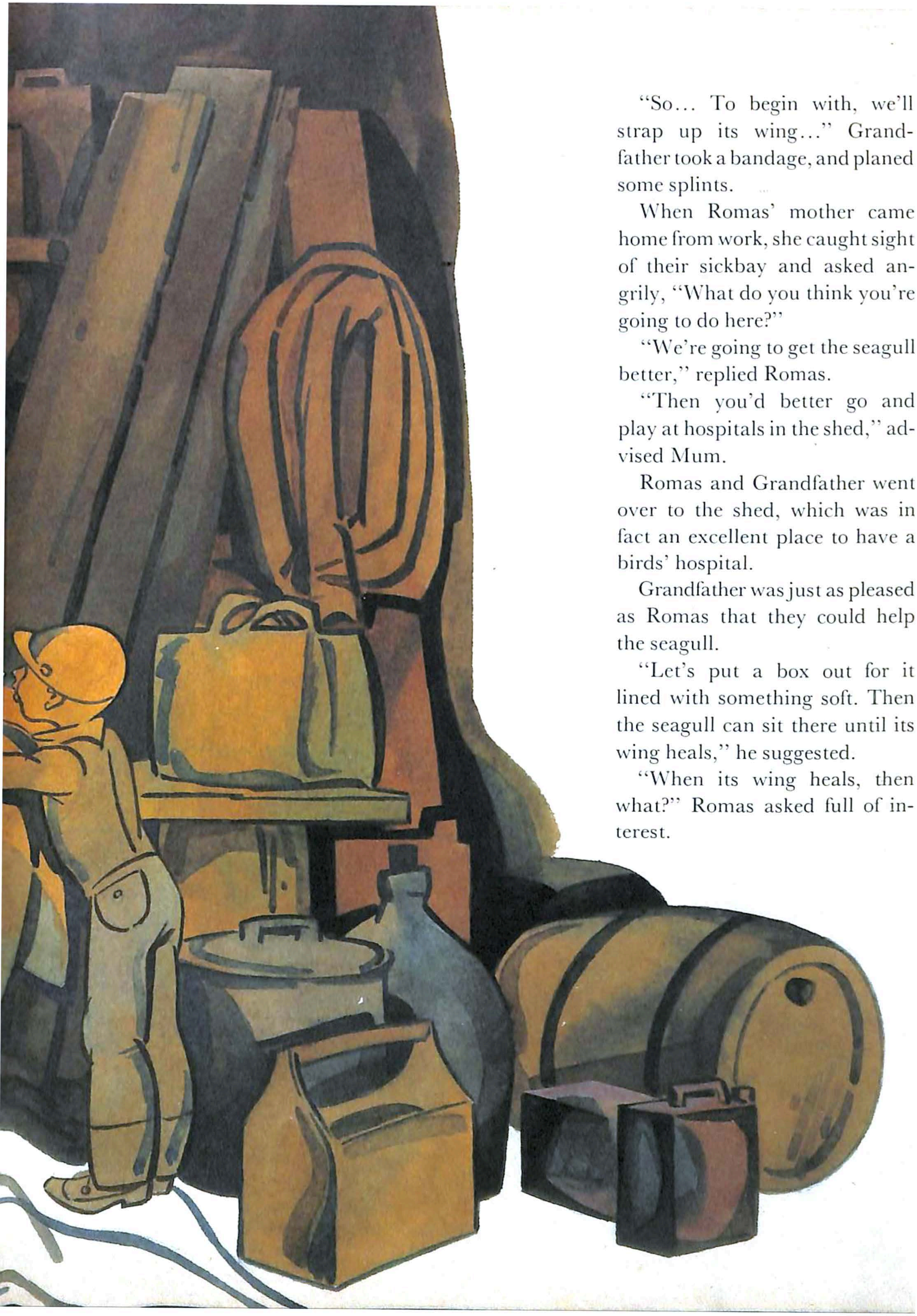
"Of course, it's a shame about the seagull," Grandfather nodded his head understandingly and patted his grandson on the shoulder.

Vilius took the rouble and thrust the bird into Romas' hands. He was pleased, and Romas was glad, too. He carefully pressed the bird he had saved to his chest and went home accompanied by Danutė.

After he had examined the broken wing, Grandfather said, "You did a good thing. We'll get it better. There'll be one more seagull in the world."

Now Romas was really glad, too. Although he was still a little sorry that he'd had to give up his brand new rouble...





"So... To begin with, we'll strap up its wing..." Grandfather took a bandage, and planed some splints.

When Romas' mother came home from work, she caught sight of their sickbay and asked angrily, "What do you think you're going to do here?"

"We're going to get the seagull better," replied Romas.

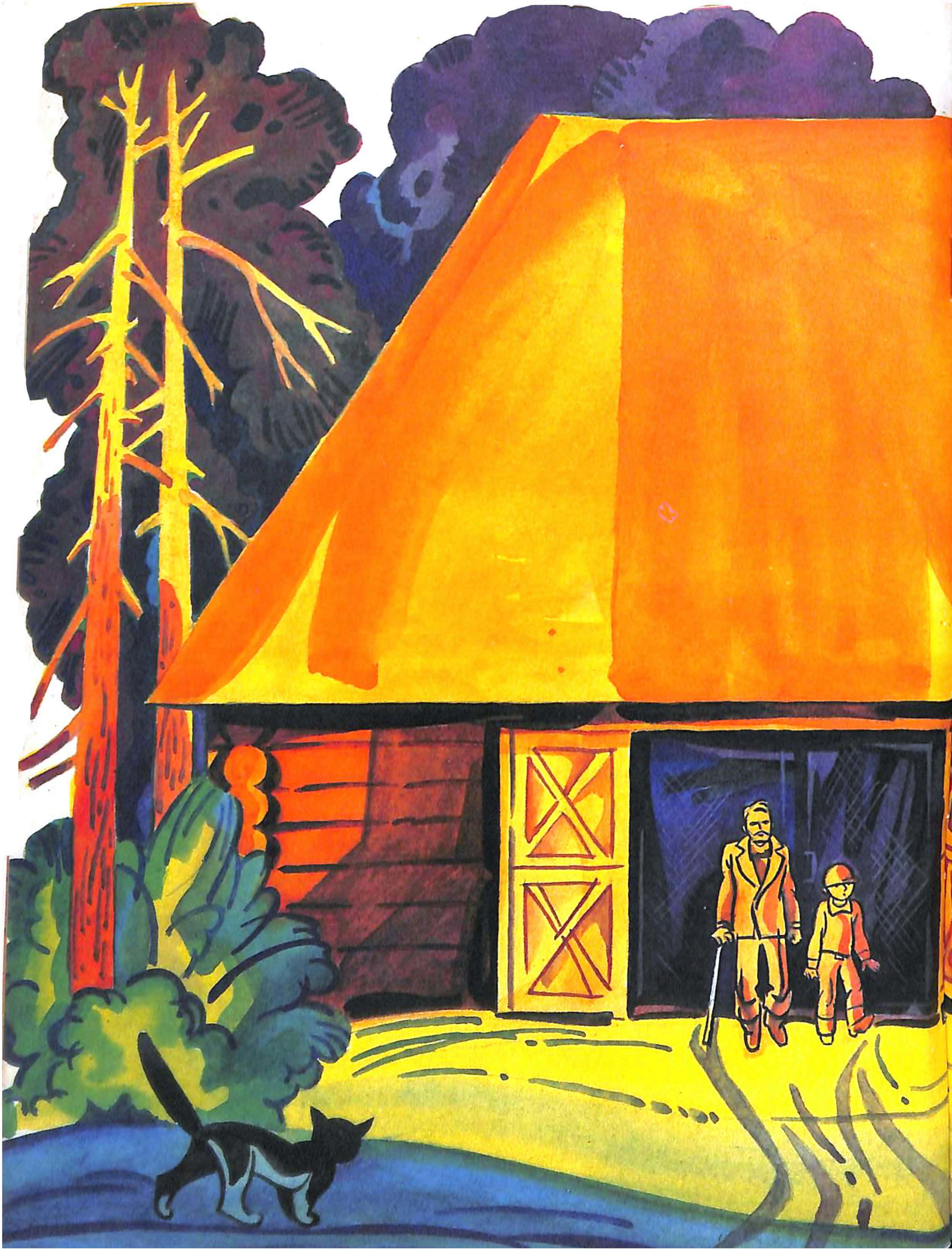
"Then you'd better go and play at hospitals in the shed," advised Mum.

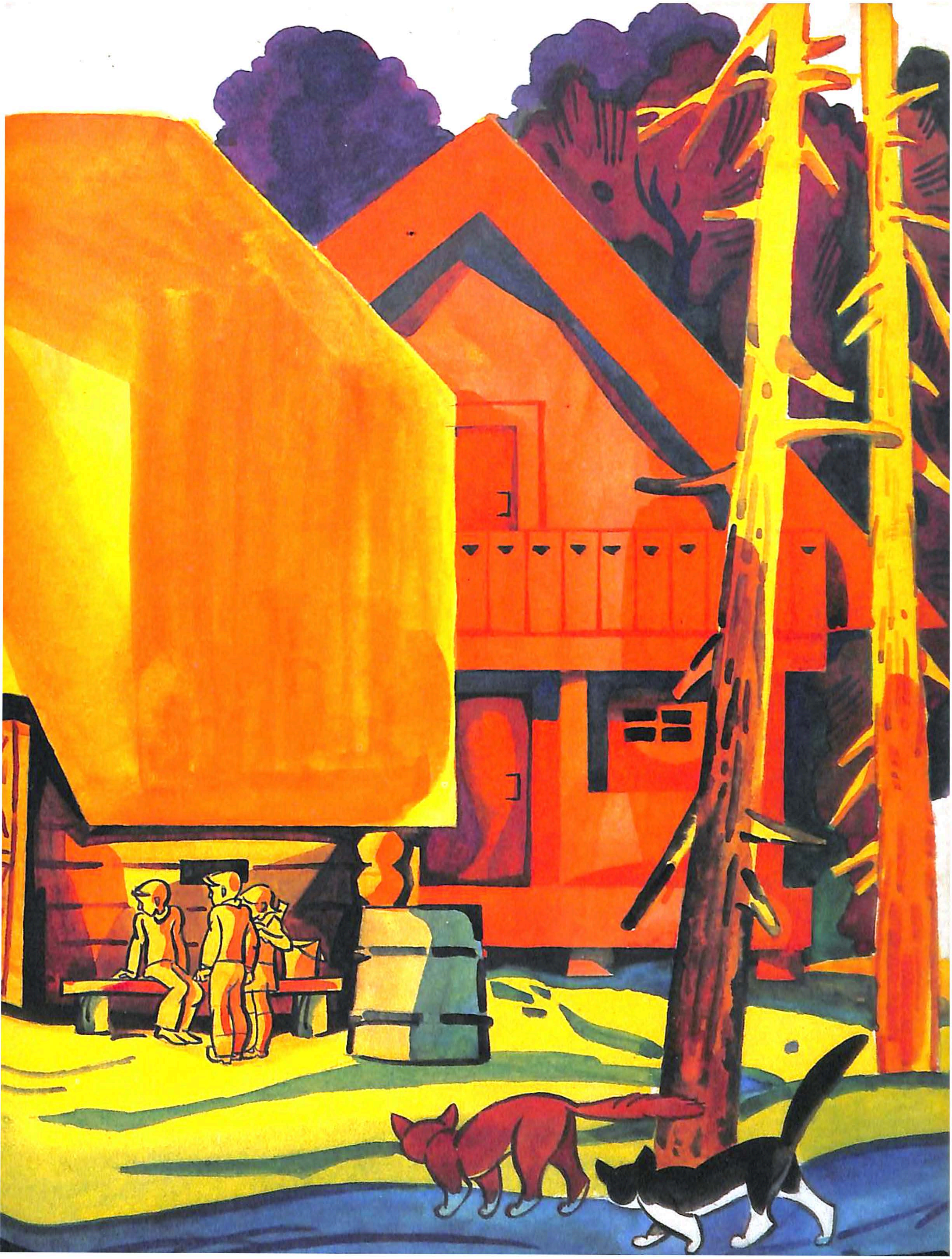
Romas and Grandfather went over to the shed, which was in fact an excellent place to have a birds' hospital.

Grandfather was just as pleased as Romas that they could help the seagull.

"Let's put a box out for it lined with something soft. Then the seagull can sit there until its wing heals," he suggested.

"When its wing heals, then what?" Romas asked full of interest.





"Then we'll think what to do next. Meanwhile you go fishing with Giedrius. Seagulls are always hungry birds."

The little patient was given twelve small perch for supper. But its appetite was poor. Perhaps it hurt it to eat. Therefore it only swallowed the four smallest of them.

The next day things were looking up. The seagull soon began to recover. A day later it no longer wanted to sit in the box, but hopped about all over the shed, dragging its bandaged wing. Romas, Giedrius, Danutė, and Rūta kept a constant watch near the shed. There were always cats slinking around. It was quite obvious what they were dreaming of.

Everyone was sorry for the seagull. They were glad that Grandfather was healing its wing so that it could fly again. Once Ignas himself peeped into the shed.

"Come on now, show me your seagull," he said.

The seagull was sitting on a stack of firewood.

"He's a cunning fellow, that Vilius," Ignas shook his head. "Fancy letting him cheat you out of a rouble for such a trifle. You're a fool for giving it to him!"

Romas' answer echoed Grandfather's words. "There'll be one more seagull on the Earth."

"You don't say, titch," smiled Ignas. "Only you'll soon have to let it go. It can't live in your shed for ever. Then you won't have a rouble or a seagull either."

Romas hadn't thought of that. Ignas had told the truth. Whether he liked it or not, he would have to part with the seagull. It would be better if it didn't get better so quickly.

But the gull was young, and Grandfather had given it good treatment. It soon recovered. When it flew round the shed, it hit the walls. They had to be careful that it didn't hurt itself again, for there was firewood, Grandfather's tools, and Dad's fishing tackle in the shed. There was about everything you could think of!...

"I think it's time to let it out," said Grandfather one morning. "What do you think?"

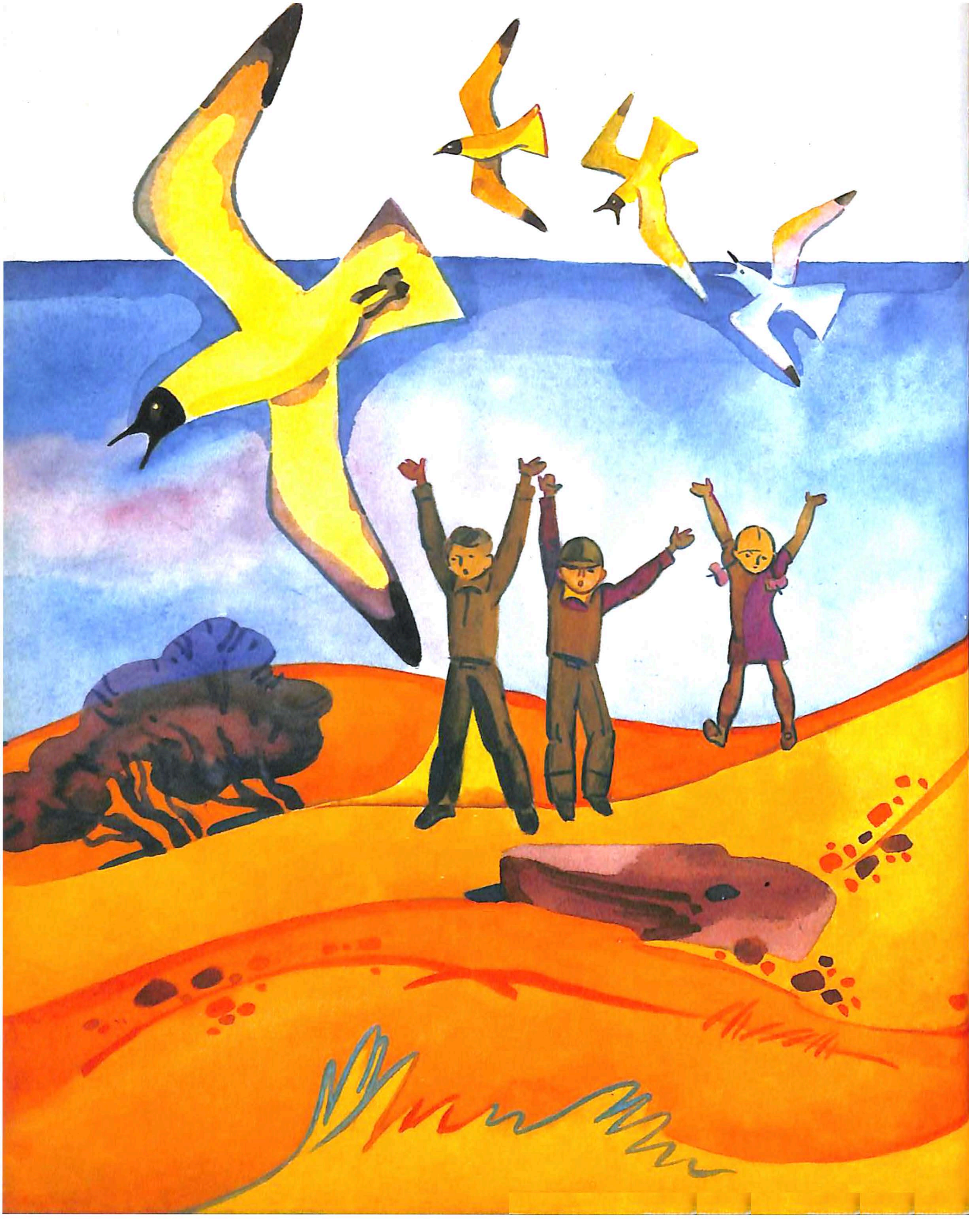
Romas' heart sank. He felt like crying. But he wasn't a baby, so he bit back his tears. All the same, he was sorry to part with the seagull!

"You can't keep seagulls as pets. They're not chickens," Grandfather persuaded Romas, shaking his head. "They need to be free."

But seeing that Romas was trying as hard as he could not to cry, Grandfather smiled, "All right, let the seagull live with us for a little while longer."

This conversation took place in the shed. Just as if it understood that it was not going to be let out, the seagull flew up to the ceiling and fell onto Dad's fishing rods, which were standing in the corner. It got caught up in them and looked at Romas with such imploring, sorrowful eyes.

"No!" cried Romas. "No, let it fly away!"



He wanted to catch the seagull to take it down to the gulf, but it wouldn't come to him.

Grandfather only managed to catch it with great difficulty. He handed the bird to Romas, who pressed it to his chest and heard a heart beating rapidly. He couldn't be sure whether it was his own or the bird's.

"Let's go, Granddad."

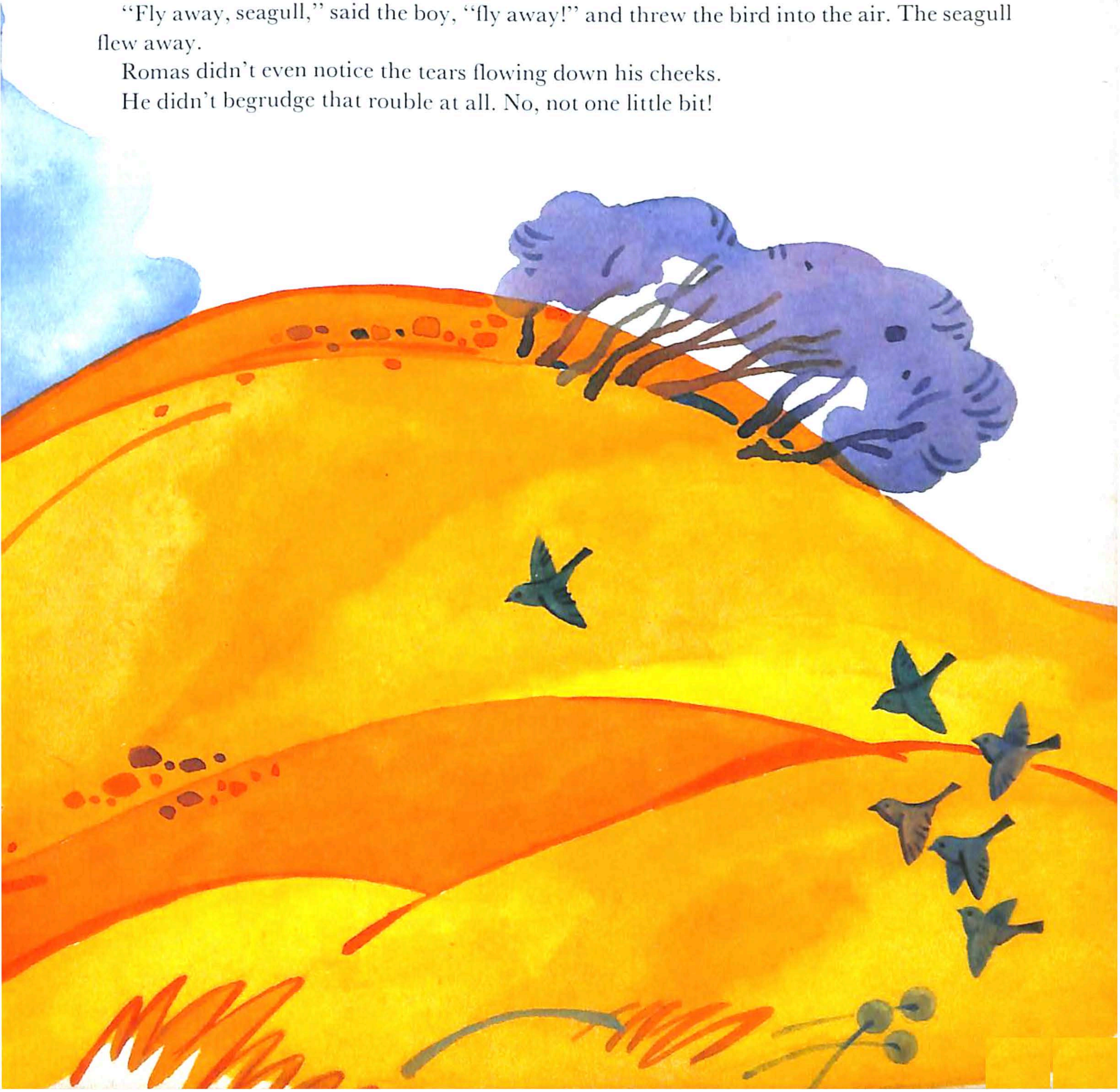
They halted on the shore of the gulf. There they found themselves encircled by Giedrius, Danutė, and Rūta.

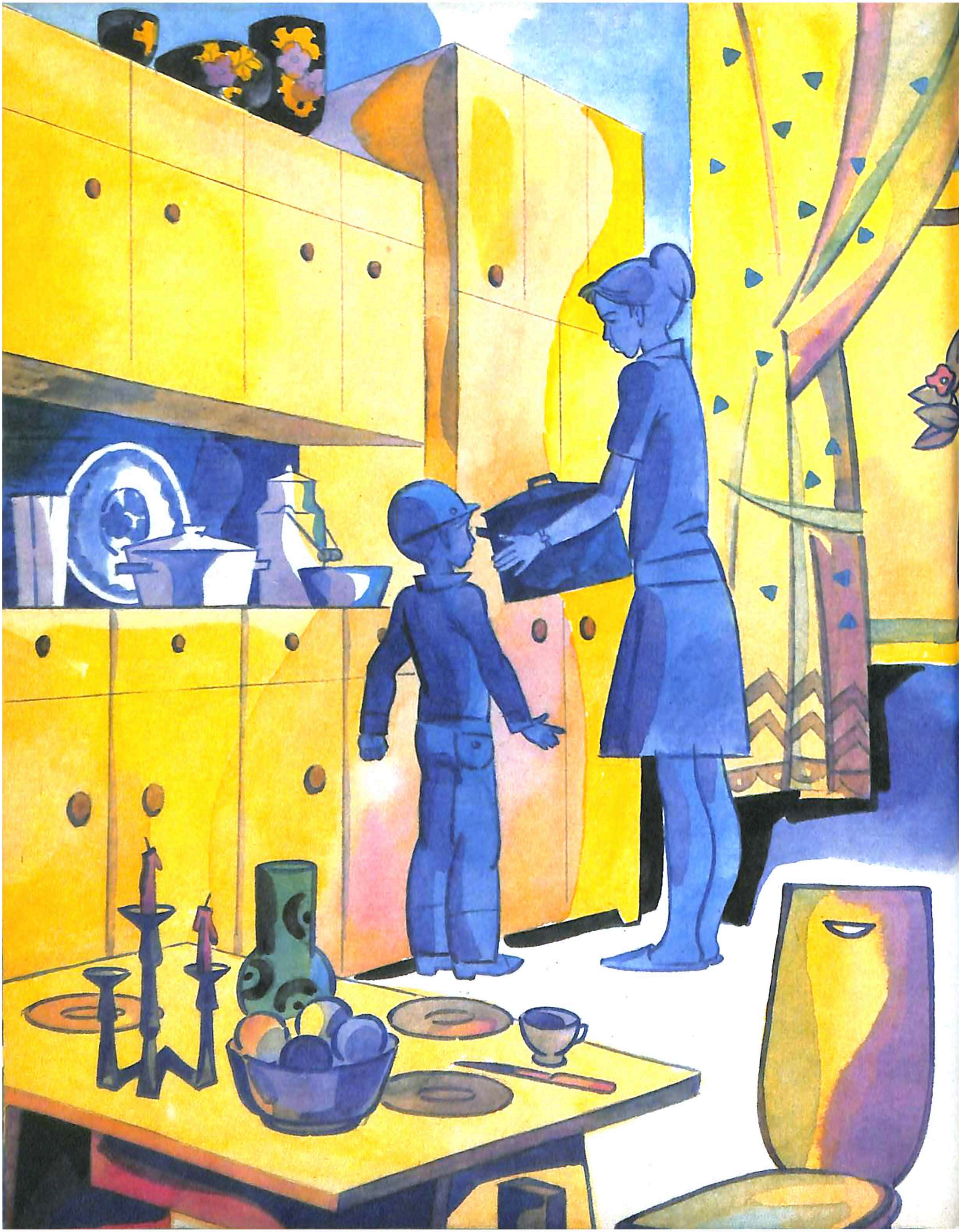
The water in the gulf was calm and resplendent. The air above it was transparent. There were gulls sitting on the water. Romas' seagull would soon join them.

"Fly away, seagull," said the boy, "fly away!" and threw the bird into the air. The seagull flew away.

Romas didn't even notice the tears flowing down his cheeks.

He didn't begrudge that rouble at all. No, not one little bit!





The Striped Benches

Romas couldn't mooch around with nothing to do all day, when he found himself in a hive of activity. That's why he went to the kitchen and begged, "Mum, give me a job to do!"

But his mother had sent him into the yard to play with the other kids, adding that she could manage without his help.

"Don't worry, the wedding here will be all it ought to be!"

Of course, it would. But he wanted to make his own contribution to the work. It was not every day that his elder brother got married.

His brother had not long returned from the Atlantic where he had worked on a fishing trawler. His fiancée Jūratė, a pretty, cheerful girl, lived in the village. Romas liked her very much. Soon they would be getting married. But why couldn't he help with the preparations?

"There isn't anyone in the yard, Mum. Now what...?" Romas had not lost hope of being given some kind of job.

"Don't get in my way. Go and see Grandfather. Ask him. He went to the neighbours to get some paint. You can go and help him paint the benches. Mind you don't get yourself covered in paint, my busy little bee!"

Romas didn't hear his mother's last words, but shot into the street like lightning.

"Where are you going?" Rūta barred his way.

"I'm looking for Grandfather. I'm going to paint the benches for the wedding now, you know."

"And I'll do some painting, too!" said Rūta eagerly.

"Why should you do it?"

"For the wedding reception, of course!"

What a wicked girl she is, thought Romas angrily. The wedding's nothing to do with her!

"You're not going to paint anything. Grandfather and I are going to do it."

"You will and I will, too."

"No, you won't."

"Oh yes, I will."

They could probably have gone on arguing for hours, but at that moment Grandfather came out of the neighbours' house, carrying two buckets of paint. The children ran up to him, angry and red in the face after their argument.

"Now, what's up?"

Grandfather could be cunning at times. He'd probably overheard them arguing, but he'd asked about it all the same.

Romas was just about to answer him, when Rūta butted in, "I want to paint the benches for the wedding reception as well!"

"Painting's not a girl's job," cried Romas, turning on Rūta. "You haven't a clue how to do it. Grandfather and I will do it ourselves!"

"And do you know how to do it?" Rūta had no intention of giving up. "Grandfather will teach us, won't you?"

Grandfather found it amusing to watch them arguing. He smiled and kept quiet, just as if Rūta hadn't asked him anything at all. Romas thought that Grandfather was on his side, stopped shouting and pompously explained to Rūta, "Painting benches is a man's job. Is that clear? You pop into the kitchen. Perhaps they'll find you something to do there."

"But I want to do some painting!" Rūta stubbornly objected and tried to take the little bucket from his grandfather.

"Don't touch!" cried Romas and grabbed the handle of the bucket himself.

"Look out, you'll spill it!" said Grandfather and gave him the bucket of paint.

Now Romas felt at last that he had won. He carried the bucket and laughed at Rūta, "I told

you to go to the kitchen. We won't let you paint the benches, will we, Granddad?"

Rūta pouted her lips and frowned, but stubbornly continued to walk by their side.

"No, Romas," said Grandfather unexpectedly. "We'll let her do some painting if she wants to. There's only one difficulty. We've only got two brushes. We'll have to work in turns. So, Rūta, you'll have to wait until one of us gets tired."

"I'll wait," agreed Rūta, who had cheered up.

"I shouldn't be too hopeful, if I were you. I'll never get tired," muttered Romas.

The benches, which his grandfather had just knocked together from planed boards, were white and smooth. They were out in the garden under the cherry-trees. There were three long ones and four shorter ones. It was hot there because there was baking sunshine and you couldn't feel the breeze.

"Take off your shirt," Grandfather ordered him. "Then you won't get it covered in paint and you'll be cooler."

Romas took off his shirt, and, after spitting on his palms, picked up the brush. "Well, Granddad, let's have a race. Let's see who can paint fastest," he shouted cheerfully.

"No one's making us hurry, you know," answered Grandfather, dipping the brush carefully into the bucket and drawing a bright green strip along the bench. "The main thing is that, if a job's worth doing, it's worth doing well."

All of a sudden Giedrius appeared from nowhere. That was all they needed!

"Oh, doesn't the paint smell nice!" Immediately he said, "Let me do some painting. I know how to."

Grandfather had to ask him to wait as well because there weren't enough brushes. Giedrius went straight home because they had some there. There was no need to worry because his father would let him borrow them. He ran home. And what do you know, a minute later he came back with a brush.

"Now, we'll get moving!" Giedrius winked cheerfully at Romas. He stood next to him and dipped his brush in the same bucket of yellow paint.

They had decided to paint the shorter benches yellow.

"I'm the only one who hasn't got anything to do," complained Rūta.

But she was in luck, for the post girl appeared in the yard. When she saw Grandfather, she waved to him and told him to go to the bank for his pension. She'd brought him the money twice, but he hadn't been in. Had he forgotten that it was time to get his pension long ago?

"I forgot because of all these goings on with the wedding," laughed Grandfather. He wiped his hands with a rag and said, "Here's the brush, Rūta. You finish painting this bench. When you've finished, don't go away. Wait for me." And Grandfather set off for the bank.

Who was in charge now? Romas, of course. It was his wedding and his benches. He began

to give orders. "Rūta, give me Grandfather's brush, and you take mine. You and Giedrius can paint with the yellow paint, and I'll paint with the green... Why don't you do as I say? Are they your benches? Is it your paint?"

But Rūta had no intention of handing over her brush.

"Grandfather told me to do it," she said and continued painting with green paint.

"He simply forgot to mention who's in charge here." Romas even stamped his foot in indignation. "He just forgot. That's all. He even forgot to get his pension. So let me have that brush!"

"Don't touch!" threatened Rūta, "Or I'll put paint all over your nose!"

"You just try," hissed Romas, carefully trying to steal up to Rūta.

But, having seized the bucket of paint, she ran round to the other side of the bench and teased him, "Come on then, come here, you'll be green like a cucumber!"

"Why are you running round the bench?"

"Because I like to. I'll run and you can catch me if you can!"

"Giedrius," commanded Romas, "come on now and help me to catch her!"

But Giedrius was busy painting and did not hear what he said.

"Giedrius!"

At last he heard, stood up straight and wiped the sweat from his brow with the back of his hand. "What's the matter with you? You should be working and not playing 'he'. Look how nicely I've painted this bench."

True, while Romas and Rūta had been arguing, he'd made a good job of painting half the bench. True, his hands were all yellow and he even had paint on his forehead. Never mind. You can't help getting paint on you, when you're painting, can you? You always do. You can wash it off with soap and hot water.

Romas agreed that Giedrius had made a really excellent job of painting the bench.

"You'll be a first class painter, when you grow up," he praised his friend. Suddenly he looked slyly at Giedrius and Rūta. " What if we paint the other halves of the benches green? They'll look nice, won't they?"

Rūta liked that idea. "Let's!" she agreed enthusiastically.

Giedrius was not so sure about it. Who ever heard of two-coloured benches?

"You do find them sometimes!" Romas persuaded him. "So, I'll begin with the green..."

"No, I will!" That was Rūta again.

"All right. You, then I, then Giedrius. When Grandfather comes, he'll be pleased that we've been so smart!"

Rūta slowly drew the brush along the bench. It was the first time in her life that she had held a paint brush, and the first time that she was painting. And not just any old thing either, but the benches for a wedding reception. That's why she was trying hard to do it well.

Romas' imagination was still at work. "We'll paint the third bench in stripes! Green and yellow, green and yellow..."

"It will be like a zebra," Giedrius burst out laughing.

"A zebra has quite different stripes–black and white ones, and ours will be yellow and green," said Rūta in support of Romas. "They'll be bright and cheerful benches!"

"You've painted that bench well," Romas praised her and as a reward Rūta handed him the brush and the bucket of green paint.

Romas had quickly finished painting the second half of the bench that Giedrius had painted yellow.

"Now, what do you think about that?"

They all agreed that it had come out rather well, and without wasting any more time talking, they set about painting the next bench in stripes.

The attractive yellow-and-green striped bench soon dried in the hot sunshine.

"Isn't it lovely!" said Romas.

"Yes, really lovely," agreed Rūta.

But Giedrius didn't like it much, so he remained silent.

Romas turned to him to ask him why he didn't say anything, and gasped, "You've sat down on a wet bench!"

Giedrius jumped up, but it was too late. His trousers were already covered in green paint.

Only then did Romas and Rūta notice that they had paint all over them, too.

"I'm afraid we're going to be in trouble," said Giedrius.

"Yes, just look what we've done to those benches," agreed Rūta. Her hands and even the tip of her nose had spots of paint on them.

At that moment Romas' mother looked out of the kitchen window and shouted, "Romas!" When she saw the children, she exclaimed "My goodness, just look at you! And who said you could spoil the benches like that?"

Then the gate creaked, and Grandfather came in. While he was still a way off he assured Romas' mother, "I said they could." When he came closer and examined the workmanship of his three helpers, he scratched his head, "Well! What of it. If something's not right, we'll put it right. They've got paint all over them, but they can go and wash. Never mind, dear. The main thing is that they weren't loafing about doing nothing. They've been working."

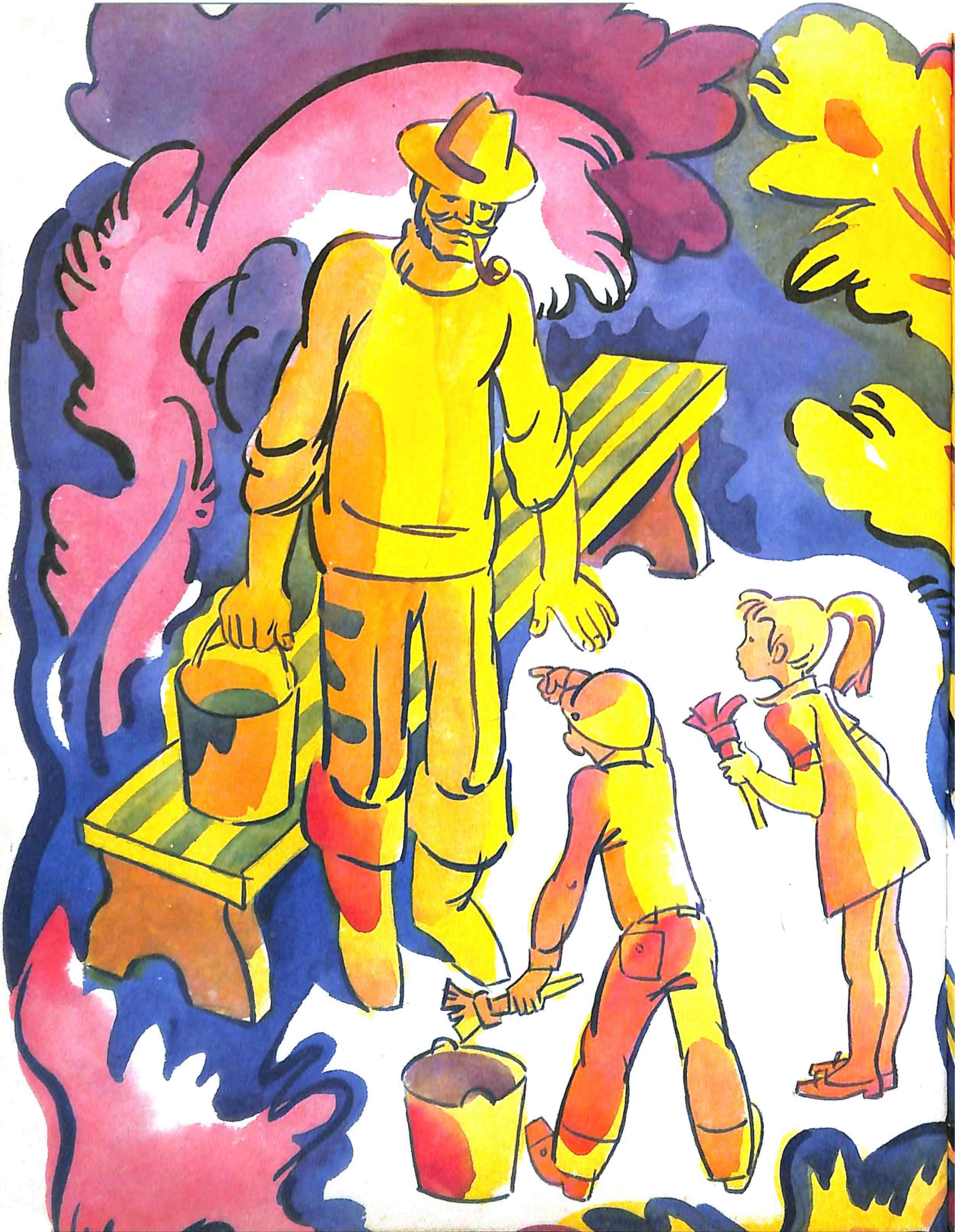
He winked at his daughter, Romas' mother, and bid her, "You go and get on with your housework. We'll sort things out for ourselves here..."

Romas' mother suddenly smiled as well and looked nice and kind. "All right. You get on with your work. When you've finished and given yourselves a good wash, come and see me, and I'll treat you to something good."

Romas thought that his grandfather wasn't very pleased with them.

"You're not cross, are you?"

"Why should I be cross? You worked as well as you knew how to."



"Well, if you're not angry, let's go on painting. In stripes!"

"If you say stripes, then stripes it is!" Grandfather picked up his brush and drew a green stripe. "It's true, you know. It makes the bench bright and cheerful! Whose idea were the stripes?"

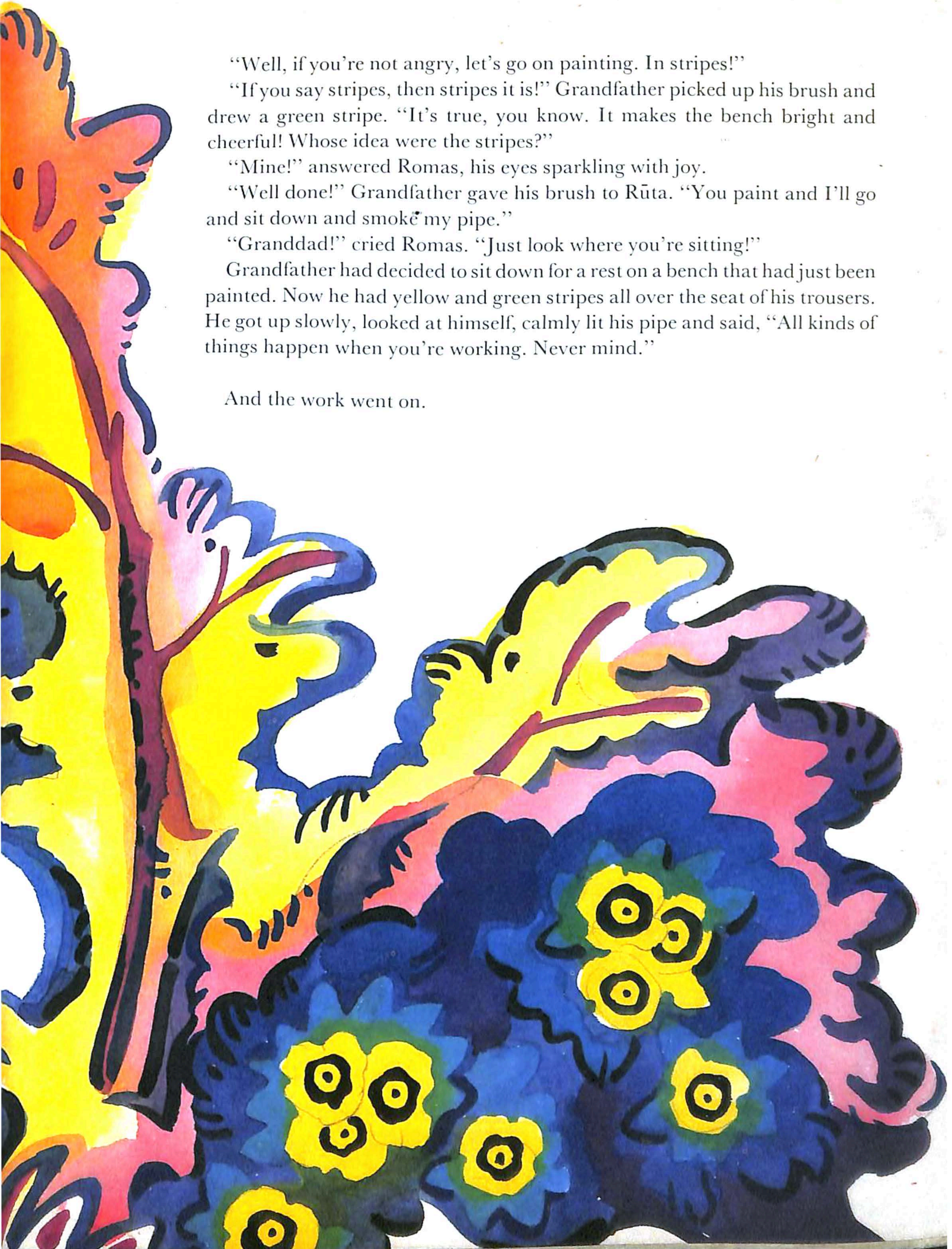
"Mine!" answered Romas, his eyes sparkling with joy.

"Well done!" Grandfather gave his brush to Rūta. "You paint and I'll go and sit down and smoke my pipe."

"Granddad!" cried Romas. "Just look where you're sitting!"

Grandfather had decided to sit down for a rest on a bench that had just been painted. Now he had yellow and green stripes all over the seat of his trousers. He got up slowly, looked at himself, calmly lit his pipe and said, "All kinds of things happen when you're working. Never mind."

And the work went on.



В. Милюнас

ЛЕТИ, ЧАЙКА!

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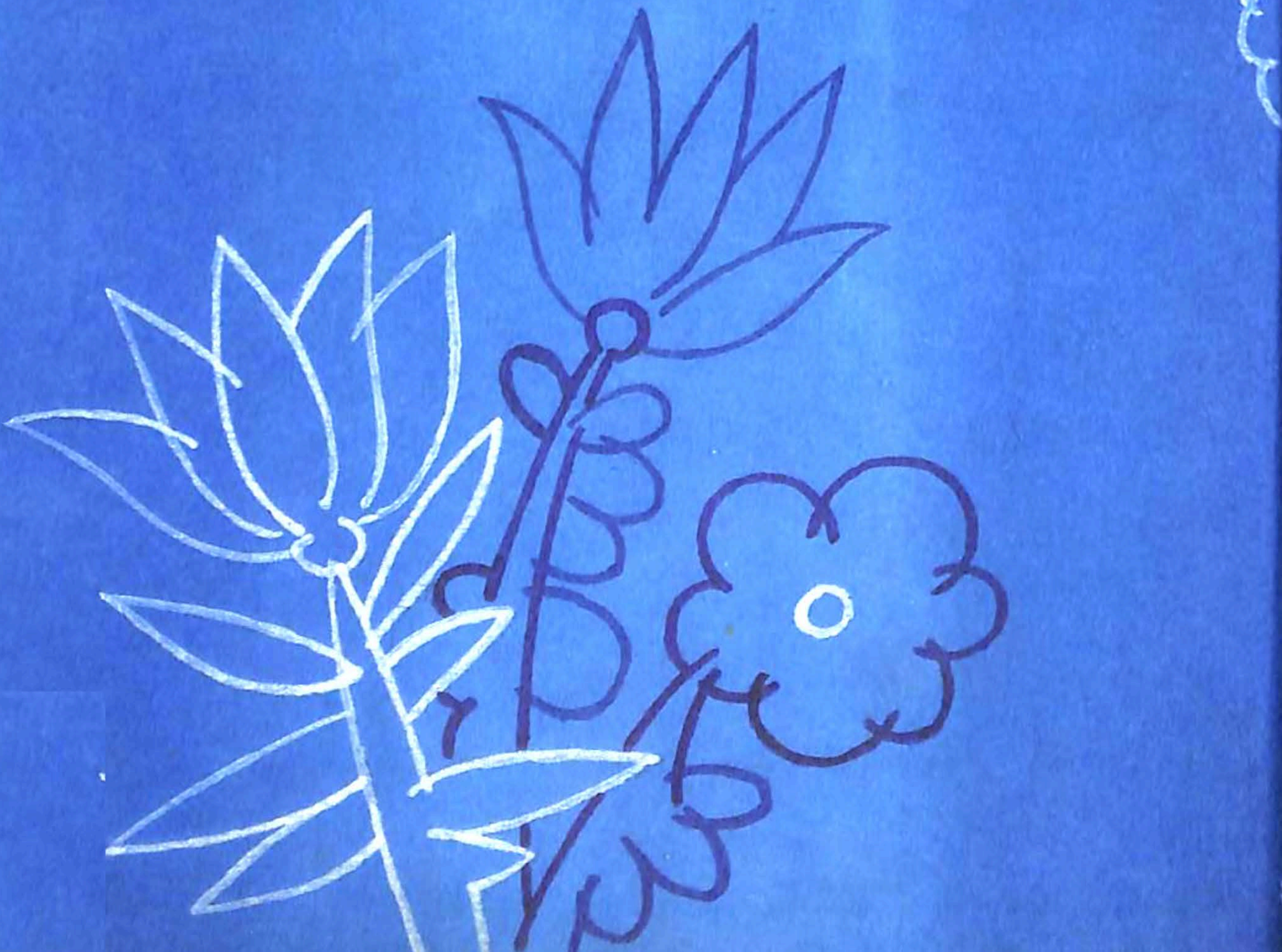

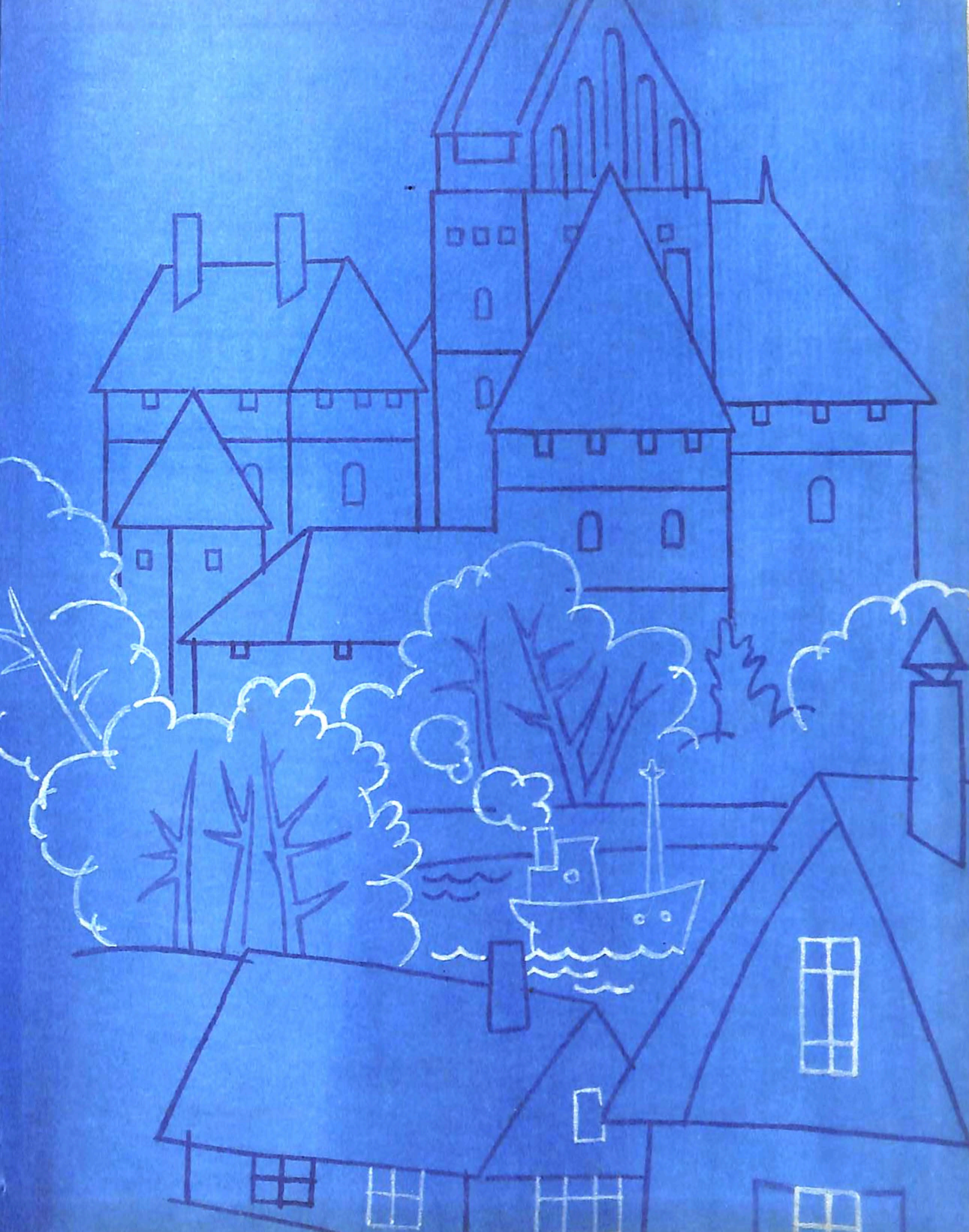

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